SPECIAL MESSENGER

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

SPECIAL MESSENGER

Works of Robert W. Chambers

The Special Messenger
The Firing Line
Some Ladies in Haste
The Younger Set
The Fighting Chance
Cardigan
The Maid-at-Arms
Lorraine
Maids of Paradise
Ashes of Empire
The Red Republic
The King in Yellow
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The Mystery of Choice
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In the Quarter
A King and a Few Dukes

For Children

Garden-Land
Forest-Land
River-Land
Mountain-Land
Orchard-Land
Outdoorland

"Daintily her handsome horse set foot in the water."

[Page 131.]

SPECIAL MESSENGER

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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TO

GEORGE F. D. TRASK

IN MEMORY OF

OUR FIRST MARTIAL EXPLOITS

IN THE NURSERY

Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.—PSALM lx, 4.

PREFACE

In the personality and exploits of the "Special Messenger," the author has been assured that a celebrated historical character is recognizable—Miss Boyd, the famous Confederate scout and spy.

It is not uncommon that the readers of a book know more about that book than the author.

R. W. C.

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PART ONE

WHAT SHE WAS

I

NONCOMBATANTS

ABOUT five o'clock that evening a Rhode Island battery clanked through the village and parked six dusty guns in a pasture occupied by some astonished cows.

A little later the cavalry arrived, riding slowly up the tree-shaded street, escorted by every darky and every dog in the country-side.

The clothing of this regiment was a little out of the ordinary. Instead of the usual campaign head gear the troopers wore forage caps strapped under their chins, heavy visors

turned down, and their officers were conspicuous in fur-trimmed hussar tunics slung from the shoulders of dark-blue shell jackets; but most unusual and most interesting of all, a mounted cavalry band rode ahead, led by a bandmaster who sat his horse like a colonel of regulars—a slim young man with considerable yellow and gold on his faded blue sleeves, and an easy manner of swinging forward his heavy cut-and-thrust sabre as he guided the column through the metropolitan labyrinths of Sandy River.

Sandy River had seen and scowled at Yankee cavalry before, but never before had the inhabitants had an opportunity to ignore a mounted band and bandmaster. There was, of course, no cheering; a handkerchief fluttered from a gallery here and there, but Sandy River was loyal only in spots, and the cavalry pressed past groups of silent people, encountering the averted heads or scornful eyes of young girls and the cold hatred in the faces of gray-haired gentlewomen, who turned their backs as the ragged guidons bobbed past and the village street rang with the clink-clank of scabbards and rattle of Spencer carbines.

But there was a small boy on a pony who sat entranced as the weather-ravaged squadrons trampled by. Cap in hand, straight in his saddle, he saluted the passing flag; a sunburnt trooper called out: "That's right, son! Bully for you!"

The boy turned his pony and raced along the column under a running fire of approving chaff from the men, until he came abreast of the bandmaster once more, at whom he stared with fascinated and uncloyed satisfaction.

Into a broad common wheeled the cavalry; the boy followed on his pony, guiding the little beast in among the mounted men, edging as close as possible to the bandmaster, who had drawn bridle and wheeled his showy horse abreast of a group of officers. When the boy had crowded up as close as possible to the bandmaster he sat in silence, blissfully drinking in the splendors of that warrior's dusty apparel.

"I'm right glad you-all have come," ventured the boy.

The bandmaster swung round in his saddle and saw a small sun-tanned face and two wide eyes intently fixed on his.

"I reckon you don't know how glad my sister and I are to see you down here," said the boy politely. "When are you going to have a battle?"

"A battle!" repeated the bandmaster.

"Yes, sir. You're going to fight, of course, aren't you?"

"Not if people leave us alone—and leave that railroad alone," replied the officer, backing his restive horse to the side of the fence as the troopers trotted past into the meadow, fours crowding closely on fours.

"Not fight?" exclaimed the boy, astonished. "Isn't there going to be a battle?"

"I'll let you know when there's going to be one," said the bandmaster absently.

"You won't forget, will you?" inquired the boy. "My name is William Stuart Westcote, and I live in that house." He pointed with his riding whip up the hill. "You won't forget, will you?"

"No, child, I won't forget."

"My sister Celia calls me Billy; perhaps you had better just ask her for Billy if I'm not there when you gallop up to tell me—that is, if you're coming yourself. Are you?" he ended wistfully.

"Do you want me to come?" inquired the bandmaster, amused.

"Would you really come?" cried the boy. "Would you really come to visit me?"

"I'll consider it," said the bandmaster gravely.

"Do you think you could come to-night?" asked the boy. "We'd certainly be glad to see you—my sister and I. Folks around here like the Malletts and the Colvins and the Garnetts don't visit us any more, and it's lonesome sometimes."

"I think that you should ask your sister first," suggested the bandmaster.

"Why? She's loyal!" exclaimed the boy earnestly. "Besides, you're coming to visit *me*, I reckon. Aren't you?"

"Certainly," said the bandmaster hastily.

"To-night?"

"I'll do my best, Billy."

The boy held out a shy hand; the officer bent from his saddle and took it in his soiled buckskin gauntlet.

"Good night, my son," he said, without a smile, and rode off into the meadow among a crowd of troopers escorting the regimental wagons.

A few moments later a child on a pony tore into the weed-grown drive leading to the great mansion on the hill, scaring a lone darky who had been dawdling among the roses.

"'Clar' tu goodness, Mars Will'm, I done tuk you foh de Black Hoss Cav'ly!" said the ancient negro reproachfully. "Hi! Hi! Wha' foh you mek all dat fuss an' a-gwine-on?"

"Oh, Mose!" cried the boy, "I've seen the Yankee cavalry, and they have a horse band, and I rode with them, and I asked a general when they were going to have a battle, and the general said he'd let me know!"

"Gin'ral?" demanded the old darky suspiciously; "who dat gin'ral dat gwine tell you 'bout de battle? Was he drivin' de six-mule team, or was he dess a-totin' a sack o' co'n? Kin you splain dat, Mars Will'm?"

"Don't you think I know a general when I see one?" exclaimed the boy scornfully. "He had yellow and gilt on his sleeves, and he carried a sabre, and he rode first of all. And—oh, Mose! He's coming here to pay me a visit! Perhaps he'll come to-night; he said he would if he could."

"Dat gin'ral 'low he gwine come here?"

muttered the darky. "Spec' you better see Miss Celia 'fo' you ax dis here gin'ral."

"I'm going to ask her now," said the boy. "She certainly will be glad to see one of our own men. Who cares if all the niggers have run off? We're not ashamed—and, anyhow, you're here to bring in the decanters for the general."

"Shoo, honey, you might talk dat-a-way ef yo' pa wuz in de house," grumbled the old man. "Ef hit's done fix, nobody kin onfix it. But dess yo' leave dem gin'rals whar dey is nex' time, Mars Will'm. Hit wuz a gin'ral dat done tuk de Dominiker hen las' time de blueco'ts come to San' River."

The boy, sitting entranced in reverie, scarcely heard him; and it was only when a far trumpet blew from the camp in the valley that he started in his saddle and raised his rapt eyes to the windows. Somebody had hung out a Union flag over the jasmine-covered portico.

"There it is! There it is, Mose!" he cried excitedly, scrambling from his saddle. "Here—take the bridle! And the very minute you hear the general dashing into the drive, let me know!"

He ran jingling up the resounding veranda —he wore his father's spurs—and mounted the stairs, two at a jump, calling: "Celia! Celia! You'll be glad to know that a general who is a friend of mine——"

"Hush, Billy," said his sister, checking him on the landing and leading him out to the gallery from which the flag hung; "can't you remember that grandfather is asleep by sundown? Now—what is it, dear, you wish to tell me?"

"Oh, I forgot; truly I did, Celia—but a general is coming to visit me to-night, if you can possibly manage it, and I'm so glad you hung out the flag—and Moses can serve the Madeira, can't he?"

"What general?" inquired his sister uneasily. And her brother's explanations made matters no clearer. "You remember what the Yankee cavalry did before," she said anxiously. "You must be careful, Billy, now that the quarters are empty and there's not a soul in the place except Mose."

"But, Celia! the general is a gentleman. I shook hands with him!"

"Very well, dear," she said, passing one arm around his neck and leaning forward

over the flag. The sun was dipping between a cleft in the hills, flinging out long rosy beams across the misty valley. The mocking birds had ceased, but a thrasher was singing in a tangle of Cherokee roses under the western windows.

While they stood there the sun dipped so low that nothing remained except a glowing scarlet rim.

"Hark!" whispered the boy. Far away an evening gunshot set soft echoes tumbling from hill to hill, distant, more distant. Strains of the cavalry band rose in the evening silence, "The Star Spangled Banner" floating from the darkening valley. Then silence; and presently a low, sweet thrush note from the dusky garden.

It was after supper, when the old darky had lighted the dips—there being no longer any oil or candles to be had—that the thrush, who had been going into interminable ecstasies of fluty trills, suddenly became mute. A jingle of metal sounded from the garden, a step on the porch, a voice inquiring for Mr. Westcote; and old Mose replying with reproachful dignity: "Mars Wes'cote, suh? Mars Wes'cote daid, suh."

"That's my friend, the general!" exclaimed Billy, leaping from his chair. "Mose, you fool nigger, why don't you ask the general to come in?" he whispered fiercely; then, as befitted the master of the house, he walked straight out into the hall, small hand outstretched, welcoming his guest as he had seen his father receive a stranger of distinction. "I am so glad you came," he said, crimson with pleasure. "Moses will take your cap and cloak— Mose!"

The old servant shuffled forward, much impressed by the uniform revealed as the long blue mantle fell across his own ragged sleeve.

"Do you know why I came, Billy?" asked the bandmaster, smiling.

"I reckon it was because you promised to, wasn't it?" inquired the child.

"Certainly," said the bandmaster hastily. "And I promised to come because I have a brother about your age—'way up in New York. Shall we sit here on the veranda and talk about him?"

"First," said the boy gravely, "my sister Celia will receive you."

He turned, leading the way to the parlor

with inherited self-possession; and there, through the wavering light of a tallow dip, the bandmaster saw a young girl in black rising from a chair by the center table; and he brought his spurred heels together and bowed his very best bow.

"My brother," she said, "has been so anxious to bring one of our officers here. Two weeks ago the Yan—the Federal cavalry passed through, chasing Carrington's Horse out of Oxley Court House, but there was no halt here." She resumed her seat with a gesture toward a chair opposite; the bandmaster bowed again and seated himself, placing his sabre between his knees.

"Our cavalry advance did not behave very well in Oxley," he said.

"They took a few chickens *en passant*," she said, smiling; "but had they asked for them we would have been glad to give. We are loyal, you know."

"Those gay jayhawkers were well disciplined for that business when Stannard took them over," said the bandmaster grimly. "Had they behaved themselves, we should have had ten friends here where we have one now."

The boy listened earnestly. "Would you please tell me," he asked, "whether you have decided to have a battle pretty soon?"

"I don't decide such matters," said the bandmaster, laughing.

"Why, I thought a general could always have a battle when he wanted to!" insisted the boy, surprised.

"But I'm not a general, Billy," replied the young fellow, coloring. "Did you think I was?"

"My brother's ideas are very vague," said his sister quickly; "any officer who fights is a general to him."

"I'm sorry," said the bandmaster, looking at the child, "but do you know, I am not even a fighting officer? I am only the regimental bandmaster, Billy—a noncombatant."

For an instant the boy's astonished disappointment crushed out his inbred courtesy as host. His sister, mortified but self-possessed, broke the strained silence with a quiet question or two concerning the newly arrived troops; and the bandmaster replied, looking at the boy.

Billy, silent, immersed in reflection, sat with curly head bent and hands folded on

his knees. His sister glanced at him, looked furtively at the bandmaster, and their eyes met. He smiled, and she returned the smile; and he looked at Billy and smiled again.

"Billy," he said, "I've been sailing under false colors, it seems—but you hoisted them. I think I ought to go."

The boy looked up at him, startled.

"Good night," said the bandmaster gravely, rising to his lean height from the chair beside the table. The boy flushed to his hair.

"Don't go," he said; "I like you even if you don't fight!"

Then the bandmaster began to laugh, and the boy's sister bit her lip and looked at her brother.

"Billy! Billy!" she said, catching his hands in hers, "do you think the only brave men are those who gallop into battle?"

Hands imprisoned in his sister's, he looked up at the bandmaster.

"If you were ordered to fight, you'd fight, wouldn't you?" he asked.

"Under those improbable circumstances I think I might," admitted the young fellow, solemnly reseating himself.

"Celia! Do you hear what he says?" cried the boy.

"I hear," said his sister gently. "Now sit very still while Moses serves the Madeira; only half a glass for Mr. William, Moses—no, not one drop more!"

Moses served the wine with pomp and circumstance; the lean young bandmaster looked straight at the boy's sister and rose, bowing with a grace that instantly entranced the aged servant.

"Celia," said the boy, "we must drink to the flag, you know;" and the young girl rose from her chair, and, looking at the bandmaster, touched her lips to the glass.

"I wish they could see us," said the boy, "—the Colvins and the Malletts. I've heard their 'Bonnie Blue Flag' and their stirrup toasts until I'm sick——"

"Billy!" said his sister quietly. And reseating herself and turning to the bandmaster, "Our neighbors differ with us," she said, "and my brother cannot understand it. I have to remind him that if they were not brave men our army would have been victorious, and there would have been no more war after Bull Run."

The bandmaster assented thoughtfully. Once or twice his worn eyes swept the room—a room that made him homesick for his own. It had been a long time since he had sat in a chair in a room like this—a long time since he had talked with women and children. Perhaps the boy's sister divined something of his thoughts—he was not much older than she—for, as he rose, hooking up his sabre, and stepped forward to take his leave, she stood up, too, offering her hand.

"Our house is always open to Union soldiers," she said simply. "Will you come again?"

"Thank you," he said. "You don't know, I think, how much you have already done for me."

They stood a moment looking at one another; then he bowed and turned to the boy, who caught his hand impulsively.

"I knew my sister would like you!" he exclaimed.

"Everybody is very kind," said the young bandmaster, looking steadily at the boy.

Again he bowed to the boy's sister, not raising his eyes this time; and, holding the child's hand tightly in his, he walked out to the porch.

Moses was there to assist him with his long blue mantle; the boy clung to his gloved hand a moment, then stepped back into the doorway, where the old servant shuffled about, muttering half aloud: "Yaas, suh. Done tole you so. He bow lak de quality, he drink lak de Garnetts—what I tole yo'? Mars Will'm, ef dat ossifer ain' er gin'ral, he gwine be mighty quick!"

"I don't care," said the boy, "I just love him."

The negro shuffled out across the moonlit veranda, peered around through the fragrant gloom, wrinkled hands linked behind his back. Then he descended the steps stiffly, and teetered about through the shrubbery with the instinct of a watchdog worn out in service.

"Nuff'n to scare nobody, scusin' de hoot owls," he muttered. "Spec' hit's time Miss Celia bolt de do', 'long o' de sodgers an' all de gwines-on. Shoo! Hear dat fool chickum crow!" He shook his head, bent rheumatically, and seated himself on the veranda step, full in the moonlight. "All de fightin's an' de gwines-on 'long o' dis here wah!" he soliloquized, joining his shriveled thumbs reflectively. "Whar de use? Spound dat!

Whar all de fool niggers dat done skedaddle 'long o' de Linkum troopers? Splain dat!" He chuckled; a whip-poor-will answered breathlessly.

"Dar dat scan'lous widder bird a-hollerin'!" exclaimed the old man, listening. "'Pears lak we's gwine have moh wah, moh daid men, moh widders. Dar de ha'nt! Dar de sign an' de warnin'. G'way, widder bird." He crossed his withered fingers and began rocking to and fro, crooning softly to himself:

"Butterfly a-flyin' in de Chinaberry tree
(Butterfly, flutter by!),
Kitty gull a-cryin' on the sunset sea
(Fly, li'l gull, fly high!),
Bully bat a-follerin' de moon in de sky,
Widder bird a-hollerin', 'Hi, dar! Hi!'
Tree toad a-trillin'
(Sleep, li'l honey!
De moon cost a shillin'
But we ain't got money!),
Sleep, li'l honey,
While de firefly fly,
An' Chuck-Will's Widder holler,
'Hi, dar! Hi!'"

Before dawn the intense stillness was broken by the rushing music of the birds—a careless,

cheery torrent of song poured forth from bramble and woodland. Distant and nearer cockcrows rang out above the melodious tumult, through which a low, confused undertone, scarcely apparent at first, was growing louder—the dull sound of the stirring of many men.

Men? The valley was suddenly alive with them, choking the roads in heavy silent lines; they were in the lanes, they plodded through the orchards, they swarmed across the hills, column on column, until the entire country seemed flowing forward in steady streams. Sandy River awoke, restlessly listening; lights glimmered behind darkened windows; a heavier, vaguer rumor grew, hanging along the hills. It increased to a shaking, throbbing monotone, like the far dissonance of summer thunder!

And now artillery was coming, bumping down the dim street with clatter of chain and harness jingling.

Up at the great house on the hill they heard it—the boy in his white nightdress leaning from the open window, and his sleepy sister kneeling beside him, pushing back her thick hair to peer out into the morning mist. On

came the battery, thudding and clanking, horses on a long swinging trot, gun, caisson, forge, mounted artillerymen succeeding each other, faster, faster under the windows. A guidon danced by; more guns, more caissons, then a trampling, plunging gallop, a rattle of sabres—and the battery had passed.

"What is that heavy sound behind the hills?" whispered the boy.

"The river rushing over the shallows—perhaps a train on the trestle at Oxley Court House—" She listened, resting her rounded chin on her hands. "It is thunder, I think. Go to bed now for a while——"

"Hark!" said the boy, laying his small hand on hers.

"It is thunder," she said again. "How white the dawn is growing. Listen to the birds—is it not sweet?"

"Celia," whispered the boy, "that is not thunder. It is too hushed, too steady—it hums and hums and hums. Where was that battery galloping? I am going to dress."

She looked at him, turned to the east and stared at the coming day. The air of dawn was full of sounds, ominous, sustained vibrations.

She rose, went back to her room, and lighted a dip. Then, shading the pallid smoky flame with her hand, she opened a door and peered into the next bedroom. "Grandfather!" she whispered, smiling, seeing that he was already awake. And as she leaned over him, searching the dim and wrinkled eyes, she read something in their unwonted luster that struck her silent. It was only when she heard her brother's step on the stairs that she roused herself, bent, and kissed the aged head lying there inert among the pillows.

"It is cannon," she breathed softly—"you know that sound, don't you, grandfather? Does it make you happy? Why are you smiling? Look at me—I understand; you want something. Shall I open the curtains? And raise the window? Ah, you wish to hear. Hark! Horsemen are passing at a gallop. What is it you wish—to see them? But they are gone, dear. If any of our soldiers come, you shall see them. That makes you happy?—*that* is what you desire?—to see one of our own soldiers? If they pass, I shall go out and bring one here to you—truly, I will." She paused, marveling at the strange light that glimmered across the ravaged visage.

Then she blew out the dip and stole into the hall.

"Billy!" she called, hearing him fumbling at the front door.

"Oh, Celia! The cavalry trumpets! Do you hear? I'm going out. Perhaps *he* may pass the house."

"Wait for me," she said; "I am not dressed. Run to the cabin and wake Moses, dear!"

She heard him open the door; the deadened thunder of the cannonade filled the house for an instant, shut out by the closing door, only to swell again to an immense unbroken volume of solemn harmony. The bird-music had ceased; distant hilltops grew brighter.

Down in the village lights faded from window and cabin; a cavalryman, signaling from the church tower, whirled his flaming torch aside and picked up a signal flag. Suddenly the crash of a rifled cannon saluted the rising sun; a shell soared skyward through the misty glory, towered, curved, and fell, exploding among the cavalrymen, completely ruining the breakfasts of chief-trumpeter O'Halloran and kettle-drummer Pillsbury.

For a moment a geyser of ashes, coffee, and bacon rained among the men.

"Hell!" said Pillsbury, furiously wiping his face with his dripping sleeve and spitting out ashes.

"Young kettle-drums, he don't love his vittles," observed a trooper, picking up the cap that had been jerked from his head by a whirring fragment.

"Rich feedin' is the sp'ilin' o' this here hoss band," added the farrier, stanching the flow of blood from his scalp; "quit quar'lin' with your rations, kettle-drums!"

"Y'orter swaller them cinders," insisted another; "they don't cost nothin'!"

The band, accustomed to chaffing, prepared to retire to the ambulance, where heretofore their fate had always left them among luggage, surgeons, and scared camp niggers during an engagement.

The Rhode Island battery, placed just north of the church, had opened; the cavalry in the meadow could see them—see the whirl of smoke, the cannoneers moving with quick precision amidst obscurity—the flash, the recoil as gun after gun jumped back, buried in smoke.

It lasted only a few minutes; no more shells came whistling down among the cavalry; and

presently the battery grew silent, and the steaming hi'l, belted with vapor, cleared slowly in the breezy sunshine.

The cavalry had mounted and leisurely filed off to the shelter of a grassy hollow: the band, dismounted, were drawn up to be told off in squads as stretcher-bearers; the bandmaster was sauntering past, buried in meditation, his sabre trailing a furrow through the dust, when a clatter of hoofs broke out along the village street, and a general officer, followed by a plunging knot of horsemen, tore up and drew bridle.

The colonel of the cavalry regiment, followed by the chief trumpeter, trotted out to meet them, saluting sharply; there was a quick exchange of words; the general officer waved his hand toward the south, wheeled his horse, hesitated, and pointed at the band.

"How many sabres?" he asked.

"Twenty-seven," replied the colonel—"no carbines."

"Better have them play you in—*if you go*," said the officer.

The colonel saluted and backed his horse as the cavalcade swept past him; then he beckoned to the bandmaster.

"Here's your chance," he said. "Orders are to charge anything that appears on that road. You'll play us in this time. Mount your men."

Ten minutes later the regiment, band ahead, marched out of Sandy River and climbed the hill, halting in the road that passed the great white mansion. As the outposts moved forward they encountered a small boy on a pony, who swung his cap at them gayly as he rode. Squads, dismounted, engaged in tearing away the rail fences bordering the highway, looked around, shouting a cheery answer to his excited greeting; the colonel on a ridge to the east lowered his field glasses to watch him; the bandmaster saw him coming and smiled as the boy drew bridle beside him, saluting.

"If you're not going to fight, why are you here?" asked the boy breathlessly.

"It really looks," said the bandmaster, "as though we might fight, after all."

"*You, too?*"

"Perhaps."

"Then—could you come into the house—just a moment? My sister asked me to find you."

A bright blush crept over the bandmaster's sun-tanned cheeks.

"With pleasure," he said, dismounting, and leading his horse through the gateway and across the shrubbery to the trees.

"Celia! Celia!" called the boy, running up the veranda steps. "*He* is here! Please hurry, because he's going to have a battle!"

She came slowly, pale and lovely in her black gown, and held out her hand.

"There is a battle going on all around us, isn't there?" she asked. "That is what all this dreadful uproar means?"

"Yes," he said; "there is trouble on the other side of those hills."

"Do you think there will be fighting here?"

"I don't know," he said.

She motioned him to a veranda chair, then seated herself. "What shall we do?" she asked calmly. "I am not alarmed—but my grandfather is bedridden, and my brother is a child. Is it safe to stay?"

The bandmaster looked at her helplessly.

"I don't know," he repeated—"I don't know what to say. Nobody seems to understand what is happening; we in the regiment are never told anything; we know nothing

except what passes under our eyes." He broke off suddenly; the situation, her loneliness, the impending danger, appalled him.

"May I ask a little favor?" she said, rising. "Would you mind coming in a moment to see my grandfather?"

He stood up obediently, sheathed sabre in his left hand; she led the way across the hall and up the stairs, opened the door, and motioned toward the bed. At first he saw nothing save the pillows and snowy spread.

"Will you speak to him?" she whispered.

He approached the bed, cap in hand.

"He is very old," she said; "he was a soldier of Washington. He desires to see a soldier of the Union."

And now the bandmaster perceived the occupant of the bed, a palsied, bloodless phantom of the pa . – an inert, bedridden, bony thing that looked dead until its deep eyes opened and fixed themselves on him.

"This is a Union soldier, grandfather," she said, kneeling on the floor beside him. And to the bandmaster she said in a low voice: "Would you mind taking his hand? He cannot move."

The bandmaster bent stiffly above the bed and took the old man's hand in his.

The sunlit room trembled in the cannonade.

"That is all," said the girl simply. She took the fleshless hand, kissed it, and laid it on the bedspread. "A soldier of Washington," she said dreamily. "I am glad he has seen you—I think he understands: but he is very, very old."

She lingered a moment to touch the white hair with her hand; the bandmaster stepped back to let her pass, then put on his cap, hooked his sabre, turned squarely toward the bed and saluted.

The phantom watched him as a dying eagle watches; then the slim hand of the granddaughter fell on the bandmaster's arm, and he turned and clanked out into the open air.

The boy stood waiting for them, and as they appeared, he caught their hands in each of his, talking all the while and walking with them to the gateway, where pony and charger stood, nose to nose under the trees.

"If you need anybody to dash about carrying dispatches," the boy ran on, "why, I'll do it for you. My father was a soldier, and I'm going to be one, and I——"

"Billy," said the bandmaster abruptly, "when we charge, go up on that hill and watch us. If we don't come back, you must be ready to act a man's part. Your sister counts on you."

They stood a moment there together, saying nothing. Presently some mounted officers on the hill wheeled their horses and came spurring toward the column drawn up along the road. A trumpet spoke briskly; the bandmaster turned to the boy's sister, looked straight into her eyes, and took her hand.

"I think we're going," he said; "I am trying to thank you— I don't know how. Good-by."

"Is it a charge?" cried the boy.

"Good-by," said the bandmaster, smiling, holding the boy's hand tightly. Then he mounted, touched his cap, wheeled, and trotted off, freeing his sabre with his right hand.

The colonel had already drawn his sabre, the chief bugler sat his saddle, bugle lifted, waiting. A loud order, repeated from squadron to squadron, ran down the line; the restive horses wheeled, trampled forward, and halted.

"Draw—sabres!"

The air shrilled with the swish of steel.

Far down the road horsemen were galloping in—the returning pickets.

"Forward!"

They were moving.

"Steady—right dress!" taken up in turn by the company officers—"steady—right dress!"

The bandmaster swung his sabre forward; the mounted band followed.

Far away across the level fields something was stirring; the colonel saw it and turned in his saddle, scanning the column that moved forward on a walk.

Half a mile, and, passing a hill, an infantry regiment rose in the shallow trenches to cheer them. Instantly the mounted band burst out into "The Girl I Left Behind Me"; an electric thrill passed along the column.

"Steady! Steady! Right dress!" rang the calm orders as a wood, almost behind them, was suddenly fringed with white smoke and a long, rolling crackle broke out.

"By fours—right-about—wheel!"

The band swung out to the right; the squadrons passed on; and—"Steady! Trot! Steady—right dress—gallop!" came the orders.

The wild music of "Garryowen" set the horses frantic—and the men, too. The band, still advancing at a walk, was dropping rapidly behind. A bullet hit kettle-drummer Pillsbury, and he fell with a grunt, doubling up across his nigh kettle-drum. A moment later Peters struck his cymbals wildly together and fell clean out of his saddle, crashing to the sod. Schwarz, his trombone pierced by a ball, swore aloud and dragged his frantic horse into line.

"Right dress!" said the bandmaster blandly, mastering his own splendid mount as a bullet grazed its shoulder.

They were in the smoke now, they heard the yelling charge ahead, the rifle fire raging, swelling to a terrific roar; and they marched forward, playing "Garryowen"—not very well, for Connor's jaw was half gone, and Bradley's horse was down; and the bandmaster, reeling in the saddle, parried blow on blow from a clubbed rifle, until a stunning crack alongside of the head laid him flat across his horse's neck. And there he clung till he tumbled off, a limp, loose-limbed mass, lying in the trampled grass under the heavy pall of smoke.

Long before sunset the echoing thunder in the hills had ceased; the edge of the great battle that had skirted Sandy River, with a volley or two and an obscure cavalry charge, was ended. Beyond the hills, far away on the horizon, the men of the North were tramping forward through the Confederacy. The immense exodus had begun again; the invasion was developing; and as the tremendous red spectre receded, the hem of its smoky robe brushed Sandy River and was gone, leaving a scorched regiment or two along the railroad, and a hospital at Oxley Court House overcrowded.

In the sunset light the cavalry returned passing the white mansion on the hill. They brought in their dead and wounded on hay wagons; and the boy, pale as a spectre, looked on, while the creaking wagons passed by under the trees.

But it was his sister whose eyes caught the glitter of a gilt and yellow sleeve lying across the hay; and she dropped her brother's hand and ran out into the road.

"Is he dead?" she asked the trooper who was driving.

"No, miss. Will you take him in?"

"Yes," she said. "Bring him."

The driver drew rein, wheeled his team, and drove into the great gateway. "Hospital's plum full, ma'am," he said. "Wait; I'll carry him up. Head's bust a leetle—that's all. A day's nussin' will bring him into camp again."

The trooper staggered upstairs with his burden, leaving a trail of dark, wet spots along the stairs, even up to the girl's bed, where he placed the wounded man.

The bandmaster became conscious when they laid him on the bed, but the concussion troubled his eyes so that he was not certain that she was there until she bent close over him, looking down at him in silence.

"I thought of you—when I was falling," he explained vaguely—"only of you."

The color came into her face; but her eyes were steady. She set the flaring dip on the bureau and came back to the bed. "We thought of you, too," she said.

His restless hand, fumbling the quilt, closed on hers; his eyes were shut, but his lips moved, and she bent nearer to catch his words:

"We noncombatants get into heaps of trouble—don't we?"

"Yes," she whispered, smiling; "but the worst is over now."

"There is worse coming."

"What?"

"We march—to-morrow. I shall never see you again."

After a silence she strove gently to release her hand; but his held it; and after a long while, as he seemed to be asleep, she sat down on the bed's edge, moving very softly lest he awaken. All the tenderness of innocence was in her gaze, as she laid her other hand over his and left it there, even after he stirred and his unclosing eyes met hers.

"Celia!" called the boy, from the darkened stairway, "there's a medical officer here."

"Bring him," she said. She rose, her lingering fingers still in his, looking down at him all the while; their hands parted, and she moved backward slowly, her young eyes always on his.

The medical officer passed her, stepping quickly to the bedside, stopped short, hesitated, and bending, opened the clotted shirt, placing a steady hand over the heart.

The next moment he straightened up, pulled the sheet over the bandmaster's face, and

turned on his heel, nodding curtly to the girl as he passed out.

When he had gone, she walked slowly to the bed and drew the sheet from the bandmaster's face.

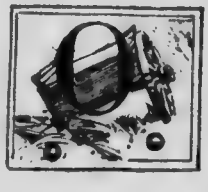
And as she stood there, dry-eyed, mute, from the dusky garden came the whispering cry of the widow bird, calling, calling to the dead that answer never more.

PART TWO

WHAT SHE BECAME

II

SPECIAL MESSENGER



ON the third day the pursuit had become so hot, so unerring, that she dared no longer follow the rutty cart road. Toward sundown she wheeled her big bony roan into a cow path which twisted through alders for a mile or two, emerging at length on a vast stretch of rolling country, where rounded hills glimmered golden in the rays of the declining sun. Tall underbrush flanked the slopes; little streams ran darkling through the thickets; the ground was moist,

even on the ridges; and she could not hope to cover the deep imprint of her horse's feet.

She drew bridle, listening, her dark eyes fixed on the setting sun. There was no sound save the breathing of her horse, the far sweet trailing song of a spotted sparrow, the undertones of some hidden rill welling up through matted tangles of vine and fern and long wild grasses.

Sitting her worn saddle, sensitive face partly turned, she listened, her eyes sweeping the bit of open ground behind her. Nothing moved there.

Presently she slipped off one gauntlet, fumbled in her corsage, drew out a crumpled paper, and spread it flat. It was a map. With one finger she traced her road, bending in her saddle, eyebrows gathering in perplexity. Back and forth moved the finger, now hovering here and there in hesitation, now lifted to her lips in silent uncertainty. Twice she turned her head, intensely alert, but there was no sound save the cawing of crows winging across the deepening crimson in the west.

At last she folded the map and thrust it into the bosom of her mud-splashed habit; then, looping up the skirt of her kirtle, she

dismounted, leading her horse straight into the oak scrub and on through a dim mile of woodland, always descending, until the clear rushing music of a stream warned her, and she came out along the thicket's edge into a grassy vale among the hills.

A cabin stood there, blue smoke lazily rising from the chimney; a hen or two sat huddled on the shafts of an ancient buckboard standing by the door. In the clear, saffron-tinted evening light some ducks sailed and steered about the surface of a muddy puddle by the barn, sousing their heads, wriggling their tails contentedly.

As she walked toward the shanty, leading her horse, an old man appeared at the open doorway, milking stool under one gaunt arm, tin pail dangling from the other. Astonished, he regarded the girl steadily, answering her low, quick greeting with a nod of his unkempt gray head.

"How far is the pike?" she asked.

"It might be six mile," he said, staring.

"Is there a wood road?"

He nodded.

"Where does it lead?"

"It leads just now," he replied grimly,

"into a hell's mint o' rebels. What's your business in these parts, ma'am?"

Her business was to trust no one, yet there had been occasions when she had been forced to such a risk. This was one. She looked around at the house, the dismantled buckboard tenanted by roosting chickens, the ducks in the puddle, the narrow strip of pasture fringing the darkening woods. She looked into his weather-ravaged visage, searching the small eyes that twinkled at her intently out of a mass of wrinkles.

"Are you a Union man?" she asked.

His face hardened; a slow color crept into the skin above his sharp cheek bones. "What's that to you?" he demanded.

"Here in Pennsylvania we expect to find Union sentiments. Besides, you just now spoke of rebels——"

"Yes, an' I'll say it again," he repeated doggedly; "the Pennsylvany line is crawlin' with rebels, an' they'll butt into our cavalry before morning."

She laughed, stepping nearer, the muddy skirt of her habit lifted.

"I must get to Reynolds's corps to-night," she said confidingly. "I came through the

lines three days ago; their cavalry have followed me ever since. I can't shake them off; they'll be here by morning—as soon as there's light enough to trace my horse."

She looked back at the blue woods thoughtfully, patting her horse's sleek neck.

He followed her glance, then his narrowing eyes focused on her as she turned her head toward him again.

"What name?" he asked harshly, hand to his large ear.

She smiled, raising her riding whip in quaint salute; and in a low voice she named herself demurely.

There was a long silence.

"Gosh!" he muttered, fascinated gaze never leaving her; "to think that you are that there gal! I heard tell you was young, an' then I heard tell you was old an' fat, ma'am. I guess there ain't many has seen you to take notice. I guess you must be hard run to even tell me who ye be?"

She said quietly: "I think they mean to get me this time. Is there a clear road anywhere? Even if I leave my horse and travel afoot?"

"Is it a hangin' matter?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

Presently he said: "The hull blame country's crawlin' with rebel cavalry. I was to Mink Creek, an' they was passin' on the pike, wagons an' guns as fur as I could see. They levied on Swamp Holler at sunup; they was on every road along the State line. There ain't no road nor cow path clear that way."

"And none the other way," she said. "Can't you help me?"

He looked at her gravely, then his small eyes swept the limited landscape.

"A hangin' matter," he mused, scratching his gray head reflectively. "An' if they ketch you here, I guess I'll go to Libby, too. Hey?"

He passed his labor-worn hand over his eyes, pressing the lids, and stood so, minute after minute, buried in thought.

"Waal," he said, dropping his hand and blinking in the ruddy glow from the west, "I guess I ain't done nothin' fur the Union yet, but I'm a-goin' to now, miss."

He looked around once more, his eyes resting on familiar scenery, then he set down milking stool and pail and shuffled out to where her horse stood.

"Guess I'll hev to hitch your hoss up to that there buckboard," he drawled. "My old

nag is dead two year since. You go in, miss, an' dress in them clothes a-hangin' onto that peg by the bed," he added, with an effort. "Use 'em easy; they was *hers*."

She entered the single room of the cabin, where stove, table, chair, and bed were the only furniture. A single cheap print gown and a sunbonnet hung from a nail at the bed's foot, and she reached up and unhooked the garment. It was ragged but clean, and the bonnet freshly ironed.

Through the window she saw the old man unsaddling her horse and fitting him with rusty harness. She closed the cabin door, drew the curtain at the window, and began to unbutton her riding jacket. As her clothing fell from her, garment after garment, that desperate look came into her pale young face again, and she drew from her pocket a heavy army revolver and laid it on the chair beside her. There was scarce light enough left to see by in the room. She sat down, dragging off her spurred boots, stripping the fine silk stockings from her feet, then rose and drew on the faded print gown.

Now she needed more light, so she opened the door wide and pushed aside the curtain.

A fragment of cracked mirror was nailed to the door. She faced it, rapidly undoing the glossy masses of her hair; then lifting her gown, she buckled the army belt underneath, slipped the revolver into it, smoothed out the calico, and crossed the floor to the bed again, at the foot of which a pair of woman's coarse, low shoes stood on the carpetless floor. Into these she slipped her naked feet.

He was waiting for her when she came out into the yellow evening light, squatting there in his buckboard, reins sagging.

"There's kindlin' to last a week," he said, "the ax is in the barn, an' ye'll find a bin full o' corn meal there an' a side o' bacon in the cellar. Them hens," he added wistfully "is Dominickers. *She* was fond o' them—an' the Chiny ducks, too."

"I'll be kind to them," she said.

He rested his lean jaw in one huge hand, musing, dim-eyed, silent. Far away a cow bell tinkled, and he turned his head, peering out across the tangled pasture lot.

"We called our caow Jinny," he said. "She's saucy and likes to plague folks. But I don't never chase her; no, ma'am. You jest set there by them pasture bars, kinder foxin'

that you ain't thinkin' o' nothin', and Jinny she'll come along purty soon."

The girl nodded.

"Waal," he muttered, rousing up, "I guess it's time to go." He looked at her, his eyes resting upon the clothing of his dead wife.

"You see," he said, "I've give all I've got to the Union. Now, ma'am, what shall I tell our boys if I git through?"

In a low, clear voice she gave him the message to Reynolds, repeating it slowly until he nodded his comprehension.

"If they turn you back," she said, "and if they follow you here, remember I'm your daughter."

He nodded again. "My Cynthy."

"Cynthia?"

"Yaas, 'm. Cynthy was *her* name, you see; James is mine, endin' in Gray. I'll come back when I can. I guess there's vittles to spare an' garden sass——"

He passed his great cracked knuckles over his face again, digging hastily into the corners of his eyes, then leaned forward and shook the rusty reins.

"Git up!" he said thoughtfully, and the

ancient buckboard creaked away into the thickening twilight.

She watched him from the door, lingering there, listening to the creak of the wheels long after he had disappeared. She was deadly tired—too tired to eat, too tired to think—yet there was more to be done before she closed her eyes. The blanket on the bed she spread upon the floor, laid in it her saddle and bridle, boots, papers, map, and clothing, and made a bundle; then slinging it on her slender back, she carried it up the ladder to the loft under the roof.

Ten minutes later she lay on the bed below, the back of one hand across her closed eyes, breathing deeply as a sleeping child—the most notorious spy in all America, the famous "Special Messenger," carrying locked under her smooth young breast a secret the consequence of which no man could dare to dream of.

Dawn silvering the east aroused her. Cock-crow, ducks quacking, the lowing of the cow, the swelling melody of wild birds—these were the sounds that filled her waking ears.

Motionless there on the bed in the dim room,

delicate bare arms outstretched, hair tumbled over brow and shoulder, she lay, lost in fearless retrospection—absolutely fearless, for courage was hers without effort; peril exhilarated like wine, without reaction; every nerve and contour of her body was instinct with daring, and only the languor of her dark eyes misled the judgment of those she had to deal with.

Presently she sat up in bed, yawned lightly, tapping her red lips with the tips of her fingers; then, drawing her revolver from beneath the pillow, she examined the cylinder, replaced the weapon, and sprang out of bed, stretching her arms, a faint smile hovering on her face.

The water in the stream was cold, but not too cold for her, nor were the coarse towels too rough, sending the blood racing through her from head to foot.

Her toilet made, she lighted the fire in the cracked stove, set a pot of water boiling, and went out to the doorstep, calling the feathered flock around her, stirring their meal in a great pan the while her eyes roamed about the open spaces of meadow and pasture for a sign of those who surely must trace her here.

Her breakfast was soon over—an ash cake, a new egg from the barn, a bowl of last night's creamy milk. She ate slowly, seated by the window, raising her head at intervals to watch the forest's edge.

Nobody came; the first pink sunbeams fell level over the pasture; dew sparkled on grass and foliage; birds flitted across her line of vision; the stream sang steadily, flashing in the morning radiance.

One by one the ducks stretched, flapped their snowy wings, wiggled their fat tails, and waddled solemnly down to the water; hens wandered pensively here and there, pecking at morsels that attracted them; the tinkle of the cow bell sounded pleasantly from a near willow thicket.

She washed her dishes, set the scant furniture in place, made up the bed with the clean sheet spread the night before, and swept the floor.

On the table she had discovered, carefully folded up, the greater portion of a stocking, knitting needles still sticking in it, the ball of gray yarn attached. But she could not endure to sit there; she must have more space to watch for what she knew was coming. Her hair she

twisted up as best she might, set the pink sunbonnet on her head, smoothed out the worn print dress, which was not long enough to hide her slim bare ankles, and went out, taking her knitting with her.

Upon the hill along the edges of the pasture where the woods cast a luminous shadow she found a comfortable seat in the sun-dried grasses, and here she curled up, examining the knitting in her hands, eyes lifted every moment to steal a glance around the sunlit solitude.

An hour crept by, marked by the sun in mounting splendor; the sweet scent of drying grass and fern filled her lungs; the birds' choral thrilled her with the loveliness of life. A little Southern song trembled on her lips, and her hushed voice murmuring was soft as the wild bees' humming:

"Ah, who could couple thought of war and crime
With such a blessed time?
Who, in the west wind's aromatic breath,
Could hear the call of Death?"

The gentle Southern poet's flowing rhythm was echoed by the distant stream:

". . . A fragrant breeze comes floating by,
And brings—you know not why—
A feeling as when eager crowds await
Before a palace gate
Some wondrous pageant——"

She lifted her eyes, fixing them upon the willow thicket below, where the green tops swayed as though furrowed by a sudden wind; and watching calmly, her lips whispered on, following the quaint rhythm:

"And yet no sooner shall the Spring awake
The voice of wood and brake
Than she shall rouse—for all her tranquil charms—
A million men to arms."

The willow tops were tossing violently. She watched them, murmuring:

"Oh! standing on this desecrated mold,
Methinks that I behold,
Lifting her bloody daisies up to God,
Spring—kneeling on the sod,
And calling with the voice of all her rills
Upon the ancient hills
To fall and crush the tyrants and the slaves
Who turn her meads to graves."

Her whisper ceased; she sat, lips parted, eyes fastened on the willows. Suddenly a

horseman broke through the thicket, then another, another, carbines slung, sabres jingling, rider following rider at a canter, sitting their horses superbly—the graceful, reckless, matchless cavalry under whose glittering gray curtain the most magnificent army that the South ever saw was moving straight into the heart of the Union.

Fascinated, she watched an officer dismount, advance to the house, enter the open doorway, and disappear. Minute after minute passed; the troopers quietly sat their saddles; the frightened chickens ventured back, roaming curiously about these strange horses that stood there stamping, whisking their tails, tossing impatient heads in the sunshine.

Presently the officer reappeared and walked straight to the barn, a trooper dismounting to follow him. They remained in the barn for a few moments only, then hurried out again, heads raised, scanning the low circling hills. Ah! Now they caught sight of her! She saw the officer come swinging up the hillside, buttons, spurs, and sword hilt glittering in the sun; she watched his coming with a calm almost terrible in its breathless concentration. Nearer, nearer he came, mounting the easy

slope with a quick, boyish swing; and now he had halted, slouch hat aloft; and she heard his pleasant, youthful voice:

"I reckon you haven't seen a stranger pass this way, ma'am, have you?"

"There was a lady came last night," she answered innocently.

"That's the one!" he said, in his quick, eager voice. "Can you tell me where she went?"

"She said she was going west."

"Has she gone?"

"She left the house when I did," answered the girl simply.

"Riding!" he exclaimed. "She came on a hoss, I reckon?"

"Yes."

"And she rode west?"

"I saw her going west," she nodded, resuming her knitting.

The officer turned toward the troopers below, drew out a handkerchief and whipped the air with it for a second or two, then made a sweeping motion with his arm, and drawing his sabre struck it downward four times.

Instantly the knot of troopers fell apart,

scattering out and spurring westward in diverging lines; the officer watched them until the last horse had disappeared, then he lazily sheathed his sabre, unbuckled a field glass, adjusted it, and seated himself on the grass beside her.

"Have you lived here long?" he asked pleasantly, setting the glass to his eye and carefully readjusting the lens.

"No."

"Your father is living, is he not?"

She did not reply.

"I reckon Gilson's command met him a piece back in the scrub, driving a wagon and a fine horse."

She said nothing; her steady fingers worked the needles, and presently he heard her softly counting the stitches as she turned the heel.

"He said we'd find his 'Cynthy' here," observed the youthful officer, lowering his glass. "Are you Cynthia Gray, ma'am?"

"He named me Cynthia," she said, with a smile.

He plucked a blade of grass, and placing it between his white teeth, gazed at her so steadily that she dropped a stitch, recovered it,

and presently he saw her lips resuming the silent count. He reseated himself on the grass, laying his field glass beside him.

"I reckon your folk are all Yankee," he ventured softly.

She nodded.

"Are you afraid of us? Do you hate us, ma'am?"

She shook her head, stealing a glance at him from her lovely eyes. If that was part of her profession, she had learned it well; for he laughed and stretched out, resting easily on one elbow, looking up at her admiringly under her faded sunbonnet.

"Are you ever lonely here?" he inquired gravely.

Again her dark eyes rested on him shyly, but she shook her head in silence.

"Never lonely without anybody to talk to?" he persisted, removing his slouched army hat and passing his hands over his forehead.

"What have I to say to anybody?" she asked coquettishly.

A little breeze sprang up, stirring his curly hair and fluttering the dangling strings of her sunbonnet. He lay at full length there, a slender, athletic figure in his faded gray uni-

form, idly pulling the grass up to twist and braid into a thin green rope.

The strange exhilaration that danger had brought had now subsided; she glanced at him indifferently, noting the well-shaped head, the boyish outlines of face and figure. He was no older than she—and not very wise for his years.

Presently, very far away, the dulled report of a carbine sounded, stirring a deadened echo among the hills.

"What's that?" she exclaimed.

"Yank, I reckon," he drawled, rising to his feet and fixing his field glass steadily on the hills beyond.

"Are you going to have a battle here?" she asked.

He laughed. "Oh, no, Miss Cynthia. That's only bushwhacking."

"But—but where are they shooting?"

He pointed to the west. "There's Yankee cavalry loafing in the hills. I reckon we'll gobble 'em, too. But don't *you* worry, Miss Cynthia," he added gallantly. "*I* shall be here to-night, and by sunrise there won't be a soldier within ten miles of you."

"Within ten miles," she murmured; "ten

miles is too near. I—I think I will go back to the house."

He looked down at her; she raised her dark eyes to him; then he bowed and gallantly held out both hands, and she laid her hands in his, suffering him to lift her to her feet.

The brief contact set the color mounting to his sunburnt temples; it had been a long while since he had touched a young girl's hand.

"I wonder," she said, "whether you would care to share my dinner?"

She spoke naturally, curiously; all idea of danger was over; she was free to follow her own instincts, which were amiable. Besides, the boy was a gentleman.

"If it wouldn't be too much to ask—too inconvenient—" He hesitated, hat in hand, handsome face brightening.

"No; I want you to come," she answered simply, and took his hand in hers.

A deeper color swept his face as they descended the gentle slope together, she amused and quietly diverted by his shyness, and thinking how she meant to give this boyish rebel a better dinner than he had had for many a long mile.

And she did, he aiding her with the vegetables, she mixing johnnycake for the entire squad, slicing the bacon, and setting the coffee to boil.

Toward midday the scouting squad returned, to find their officer shelling peas on the cabin steps, and a young girl, sleeves at her shoulders, stirring something very vigorously in a large black kettle—something that exhaled an odor which made the lank troopers lick their gaunt lips in furtive hope.

The sergeant of the troop reported; the officer nodded and waved the horsemen away to the barn, where they were presently seen squatting patiently in a row, sniffing the aroma that floated from the cabin door.

"Did your men find the lady?" she asked, looking out at him where he sat, busy with the peas.

"No, Miss Cynthia. But if she went west she's run into the whole Confederate cavalry. Our business is to see she doesn't double back here."

"Why do you follow her?"

"Ah, Miss Cynthia," he said gravely," she is that 'Special Messenger' who has done us more damage than a whole Yankee army

corps. We've got to stop her this time—and I reckon we will."

The girl stirred the soup, salted it, peppered it, lifted the pewter spoon and tasted it. Presently she called for the peas.

About two o'clock that afternoon a row of half-famished Confederate cavalrymen sat devouring the best dinner they had eaten in months. There was potato soup, there was johnnycake, smoking hot coffee, crisp slices of fragrant bacon, an egg apiece, and a vegetable stew. Trooper after trooper licked fingers, spoon, and pannikin, loosening leather belts with gratified sighs; the pickets came cantering in when the relief, stuffed to repletion, took their places, carbine on thigh.

Flushed from the heat of the stove, arms still bared, the young hostess sat at table with the officer in command, and watched him in sympathy as he ate.

She herself ate little, tasting a morsel here and there, drinking at times from the cup of milk beside her.

"I declare, Miss Cynthia," he said, again and again, "this is the finest banquet, ma'am, that I ever sat down to."

She only thought, "The boy was starving!" and the indulgent smile deepened as she sat there watching him, chin resting on her linked hands.

At last he was satisfied, and a little ashamed, too, of his appetite, but she told him it was a pleasure to cook for him, and sent him off to the barn, where presently she spied him propped up in the loft window, a map spread on his knees, and his field glass tucked under one arm.

And now she had leisure to think again, and she leaned back in her chair by the window, bared arms folded, ankles crossed, frowning in meditation.

She must go; the back trail was clear now. But she needed her own clothing and a horse. Where could she find a horse?

Hour after hour she sat there. He had cantered off into the woods long since; and all through the long afternoon she sat there scheming, pondering, a veiled sparkle playing under her half-closed lids. She saw him returning in the last lingering sun rays, leading his saddled horse down to the brook, and stand there, one arm flung across the crupper, while the horse drank and shook his thoroughbred

head and lipped the tender foliage that overhung the water. There was the horse she required! She must have him.

A few minutes later, bridle over one arm, the young officer came sauntering up to the doorstep. He was pale, but he smiled when he saw her, and his weather-beaten hat swept the grass in salute as she came to the door and looked down at him, hands clasped behind her slender back.

"You look dreadfully tired," she said gently. "Don't you ever sleep?"

He had been forty-eight hours in the saddle, but he only laughed a gay denial of fatigue.

She descended the steps, walked over to the horse, and patted neck and shoulder, scanning limb and chest and flank. The horse would do!

"Will you hitch your horse and come in?" she asked sweetly.

"Thank you, ma'am." He passed the bridle through the hitching ring at the door, and, hat in hand, followed her into the cabin. His boots dragged a little, but he straightened up, and when she had seated herself, he sank into a chair, closing his sunken eyes for a moment, only to open them smiling, and lean forward

on the rough table, folding his arms under him.

"You have been very good to us, Miss Cynthia," he said. "My men want me to say so."

"Your men are welcome," she answered, resting her cheek on her hand.

There was a long silence, broken by her: "You are dying for sleep. Why do you deny it? You may lie down on my bed if you wish."

He protested, thanking her, but said he would be glad to sleep in the hay if she permitted; and he rose, steadying himself by the back of his chair.

"I always sleep bridle in hand," he said. "A barn floor is luxury for my horse and me."

That would not do. The horse must remain. She *must* have that horse!

"I will watch your horse," she said. "Please lie down there. I really wish it."

"Why, ma'am, I should never venture——"

She looked at him; her heart laughed with content. Here was an easy way for stern necessity.

"Sleep soundly," she said, with a gay

smile; and before he could interpose, she had slipped out and shut the door behind her.

The evening was calm; the last traces of color were fading from the zenith. Pacing the circle of the cabin clearing, she counted the videttes—one in the western pasture, one sitting his saddle in the forest road to the east, and a horseman to the south, scarcely visible in the gathering twilight. She passed the barnyard, head lifted pensively, carefully counting the horses tethered there. Twelve! Then there was no guard for the northern cattle path—the trail over which she and they had come!

Now walking slowly back to the cabin, she dropped her slipper and mounted the steps on bare feet, quietly opening the door. At first in the dim light she could see nothing, then her keen ear caught the quiet sound of his breathing, and she stepped over to the bed. He lay there asleep.

Now seconds meant eternity, perhaps; she mounted the ladder to the attic, tiptoed over the loose boards, felt around for her packet, and loosened the blanket.

By sense of touch alone she dressed, belting

in the habit with her girdle, listening, every sense alert. But her hand never shook, her fingers were deft and steady, fastening button and buckle, looping up her skirt, strapping the revolver to her girdle. She folded map and papers noiselessly, tucking them into her bosom; then, carrying her spurred boots, she crept across the boards again, and descended the ladder without a sound.

The fading light from the window fell upon the bed where he lay; and she smiled almost tenderly as she stole by him, he looked so young lying there, his curly head pillowed on his arms.

Another step and she was beside him; another; she stopped short, and her heart seemed to cease at the same instant. Was she deceived? Were his eyes wide open?

Suddenly he sat bolt-upright in the bed, and at the same instant she bent and struck him a stunning blow with the butt of her revolver.

Breathless, motionless, she saw him fall back and lie there without a quiver; presently she leaned over him, tore open his jacket and shirt, and laid her steady hand upon his heart. For a moment she remained there, looking

down into his face; then with a sob she bent and kissed him on the lips.

At midnight, as she was riding out of the hill scrub, a mounted vidette hailed her on the Gettysburg pike, holding her there while horseman after horseman galloped up, and the officer of the guard came cantering across the fields at the far summons.

A lantern glimmered, flared up; there was a laugh, the sound of a dozen horses backing, a low voice: "Pass! Special Messenger for headquarters!"

Then the lantern-light flashed and went out; shadowy horsemen wheeled away east and west, trotting silently to posts across the sod.

Far away among the hills the Special Messenger was riding through the night, head bent, tight-lipped, her dark eyes wet with tears.

III

ABSOLUTION

JUST before daylight the unshaven sentinels at headquarters halted her; a lank corporal arrived, swinging a lighted lantern, which threw a yellow radiance over horse and rider. Then she dismounted.

Mud smeared her riding jacket; boots and skirt were clotted with it; so was the single army spur. Her horse stretched a glossy, sweating neck and rolled wisely-suspicious eyes at the dazzling light. On the gray

saddle cloth glimmered three gilt letters, C. S. A.

"What name, ma'am?" repeated the corporal, coming closer with lifted lantern, and passing an inquiring thumb over the ominous letters embroidered on the saddle cloth.

"No name," she said. "They will understand—inside there."

"That your hoss, ma'am?"

"It seems to be."

"Swap him with a Johnny?"

"No; took him from a Johnny."

"Shucks!" said the corporal, examining the gilt letters. Then, looking around at her:

"Wa'll, the ginrall, he's some busy."

"Please say that his messenger is here."

"Orders is formuel, ma'am. I dassent——"

She pronounced a word under her breath.

"Hey?"

She nodded.

"'Tain't *her*?" demanded the corporal incredulously.

She nodded again. The corporal's lantern and jaw dropped in unison.

"Speak low," she said, smiling.

He leaned toward her; she drew nearer, inclining her pretty, disheveled head with its

disordered braids curling into witchlocks on her shoulders.

"'Tain't *the* Special Messenger, ma'am, is it?" he inquired hoarsely. "The boys is tellin' how you was ketched down to——"

She made him a sign for silence as the officer of the guard came up—an ill-tempered, heavily-bandaged young man.

"What the —" he began, but, seeing a woman's muddy skirt in the lantern light, checked his speech.

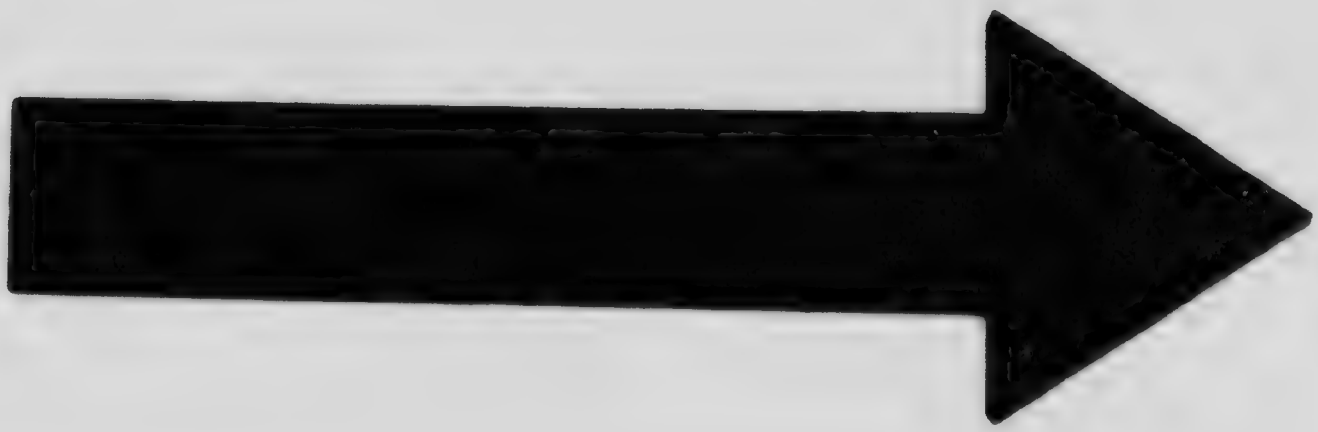
The corporal whispered in his ear; both stared. "I guess it's all right," said the officer. "Won't you come in? The general is asleep; he's got half an hour more, but I'll wake him if you say so."

"I can wait half an hour."

"Take her horse," said the officer briefly, then led the way up the steps of a white porch buried under trumpet vines in heavy bloom.

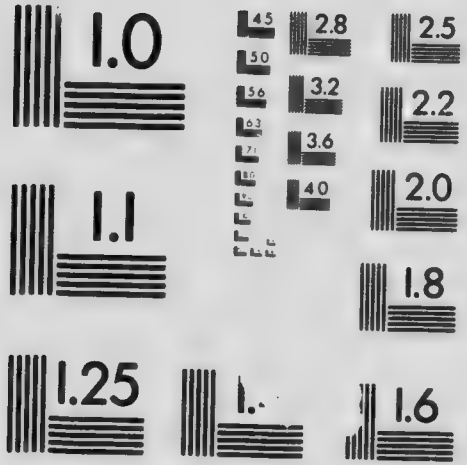
The door stood open, so did every window on the ground floor, for the July night was hot. A sentry stood inside the wide hall, resting on his rifle, sleeves rolled to his elbows, cap pushed back on his flushed young forehead.

There was a candle burning in the room on



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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the right; an old artillery officer leaned over the center table, asleep, round, red face buried in his arms, sabre tucked snugly between his legs, like the tail of a sleeping dog; an aide-de-camp slept heavily on a mahogany sofa, jacket unbuttoned, showing the white, powerful muscles of his chest, all glistening with perspiration. Beside the open window sat a thin figure in the uniform of a signal officer, and at first when the Special Messenger looked at him she thought he also was asleep.

Then, as though her entrance had awakened him, he straightened up, passed one long hand over his face, looked at her through the candlelight, and rose with a grace too unconscious not to have been inherited.

The bandaged officer of the guard made a slovenly gesture, half salute, half indicative: "The Messenger," he announced, and, half turning on his heel as he left the room, "our signal officer, Captain West," in deference to a convention almost forgotten.

Captain West drew forward an armchair; the Special Messenger sank into its tufted depths and stripped the gauntlets from her sun-tanned hands—narrow hands, smooth as a child's, now wearily coiling up the lustrous

braids which sagged to her shoulders under the felt riding hat. And all the while, from beneath level brows, her dark, distrait eyes were wandering from the signal officer to the sleeping major of artillery, to the aide snoring on the sofa, to the trumpet vines hanging motionless outside the open window. But all she really saw was Captain West.

He appeared somewhat young and thin, his blond hair and mustache were burned hay-color. He was adjusting eyeglasses to a narrow, well-cut nose; under a scanty mustache his mouth had fallen into pleasant lines, the nearsighted eyes, now regarding her normally from behind the glasses, seemed clear, unusually pleasant, even a trifle mischievous.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked respectfully.

"After the general is awake—if I might have the use of a room—and a little fresh water—" Speech died in her throat; some of the color died in her face, too.

"Did you wish me to awake him now? If your business is urgent I will," said Captain West.

She did not reply; an imperceptible twitching tightened her lips; then the young mouth

relaxed, drooping a trifle at the corners. Lying there, so outwardly calm, her tired, far-away gaze fixed absently on him, she seemed on the verge of slumber.

"If your business is urgent," he was repeating pleasantly. But she made no answer.

Urgent? No, not now. It had been urgent a second or two ago. But not now. There was time—time to lie there looking at him, time to try to realize such things as triumph, accomplishment, the excitement of achievement; time to relax from the long, long strain and lie nerveless, without strength, yielding languidly to the reaction from a task well done.

So this was success? A pitiful curiosity made her eyes wistful for an instant. Success? It had not come as she expected.

Was her long quest over? Was this the finish? Had all ended here—here at headquarters, whither she had returned to take up, patiently, the lost trail once more?

Her dark gaze rested on this man dreamily; but her heart, after its first painful bound of astonishment, was beating now with heavy, sickened intelligence. The triumph had come too suddenly.

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

She was not hungry. There was a bucket of water and a soldier's tin cup on the window sill; and, forestalling him instinctively, she reached over, plunged the cup into the tepid depths and drank.

"I was going to offer you some," he said, amused; and over the brimming cup she smiled back, shuddering.

"If you care to lie down for a few moments I'll move that youngster off the sofa," he suggested.

But fatigue had vanished; she was terribly awake now.

"Can't you sleep? You are white as death. I'll call you in an hour," he ventured gently, with that soft quality in his voice which sounded so terrible in her ears—so dreadful that she sat up in an uncontrollable tremor of revolt.

"What did you ask me?"

"I thought you might wish to sleep for half an hour——"

Sleep? She shook her head, wondering whether sleep would be more merciful to her at this time to-morrow—or the next day—or ever again. And all the time, apparently in-

different and distrait, she was studying every detail of this man; his lean features, his lean limbs, his thin, muscular hands, his uniform, the slim, light sabre which he balanced with both hands across his angular knees; the spurred boots, well groomed and well fitted; the polished cross-straps supporting field glasses and holster.

"Are you the famous Special Messenger?—if it is not a military indiscretion to name you," he asked, with a glint of humor in his pleasant eyes. It seemed to her as though something else glimmered there, too—the faintest flash of amused recklessness, as though gayly daring any destiny that might menace. He was younger than she had thought, and it sickened her to realize that he was quite as amiably conscious of her as any well-bred man may be who permits himself to recognize the charm of an attractive woman. All at once a deathly feeling came over her—faintness, which passed—repugnance, which gave birth to a desperate hope. The hope flickered; only the momentary necessity for self-persuasion kept it alive. She must give him every chance; she must take from him none. Not that for one instant she was afraid of herself—of failing

in duty; she understood that she *could* not. But she had not expected this moment to come in such a fashion. No; there was more for her to do, a chance—barely a miracle of chance— that she might be mistaken.

"Why do you think I am the Special Messenger, Captain West?"

There was no sign of inward tumult under her smooth, flushed mask as she lay back, elbows set on the chair's padded arms, hands clasped together. Over them she gazed serenely at the signal officer. And he looked back at her.

"Other spies come to headquarters," he said, "but you are the only one so far who embodies my ideal of the highly mysterious Special Messenger."

"Do I appear mysterious?"

"Not unattractively so," he said, smiling.

"I have heard," she said, "that the Union spy whom they call the Special Messenger is middle-aged and fat."

"I've heard that, too," he nodded, with a twinkle in his gray eyes—"and I've heard also that she's red-headed, peppered with freckles, and—according to report—bow-legged from too many cross-saddles."

"Please observe my single spur," she said, extending her slender, booted foot; "and you will notice that I don't fit that passport."

"My idea of her passport itemizes every feature you possess," he said, laughing; "five feet seven; dark hair, brown eyes, regular features, small, well-shaped hands——"

"Please—Captain West!"

"I beg your pardon—" very serious.

"I am not offended. . . . What time is it, if you please?"

He lifted the candle, looked closely at his watch and informed her; she expressed disbelief, and stretched out her hand for the watch. He may not have noticed it; he returned the watch to his pocket.

She sank back in her chair, very thoughtful. Her glimpse of the monogram on the back of the watch had not lasted long enough. Was it an M or a W she had seen?

The room was hot; the aide on the sofa ceased snoring; one spurred heel had fallen to the floor, where it trailed limply. Once or twice he muttered nonsense in his sleep.

The major of artillery grunted, lifted a congested face from the cradle of his folded arms, blinked at them stupidly, then his heavy,

close-clipped head fell into his arms again. The candle glimmered on his tarnished shoulder straps.

A few moments later a door at the end of the room creaked and a fully-lathered visage protruded. Two gimlet eyes surveyed the scene; a mouth all awry from a sabre-slash closed grimly as Captain West rose to attention.

"Is there any fresh water?" asked the general. "There's a dead mouse in this pail."

At the sound of his voice the aide awoke, got onto his feet, took the pail, and wandered off into the house somewhere; the artillery officer rose with a dreadful yawn, and picked up his forage cap and gauntlets.

Then he yawned again, showing every yellow tooth in his head.

The general opened his door wider, standing wiry and erect in boots and breeches. His flannel shirt was open at the throat; lather covered his features, making the distorted smile that crept over them unusually hideous.

"Well, I'm glad to see *you*," he said to the Special Messenger; "come in while I shave. West, is there anything to eat? All right; I'm ready for it. Come in, Messenger, come in!"

She entered, closing the bedroom door; the general shook hands with her slyly, saying, "I'm devilish glad you got through, ma'am. Have any trouble down below?"

"Some, General."

He nodded and began to shave; she stripped off her tight outer jacket, laid it on the table, and, ripping the lining stitches, extracted some maps and shreds of soft paper covered with notes and figures.

Over these, half shaved, the general stooped, razor in hand, eyes following her forefinger as she traced in silence the lines she had drawn. There was no need for her to speak, no reason for him to inquire; her maps were perfectly clear, every route named, every regiment, every battery labeled, every total added up.

Without a word she called his attention to the railroad and the note regarding the number of trains.

"We've got to get at it, somehow," he said. "What are those?"

"Siege batteries, General—on the march."

His mutilated mouth relaxed into a grin.

"They seem to be allfired sure of us. What are they saying down below?"

"'They seem to be allfired sure of us.'"

"They talk of being in Washington by the fifteenth, sir."

"Oh. . . . What's that topographical symbol—here?" placing one finger on the map.

"That is the Moray Mansion—or was."

"*Was?*"

"Our cavalry burned it two weeks ago Thursday."

"Find anything to help you there?"

She nodded.

The general returned to his shaving, completed it, came back and examined the papers again.

"That infantry, there," he said, "are you sure it's Longstreet's?"

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't see Longstreet, did you?"

"Yes, sir; and talked with him."

The general's body servant knocked, announcing breakfast, and left the general's boots and tunic, both carefully brushed. When he had gone out again, the Special Messenger said very quietly:

"I expect to report on the Moray matter before night."

The general buckled in his belt and hooked up his sword.

"If you can nail that fellow," he said, speaking very slowly, "I guess you can come pretty close to getting whatever you ask for from Washington."

For a moment she stood very silent there, her ripped jacket hanging limp over her arm; then, with a pallid smile:

"Anything I ask for? Did you say that, sir?"

He nodded.

"Even if I ask for—his pardon?"

The general laughed a distorted laugh.

"I guess we'll bar that," he said. "Will you breakfast, ma'am? The next room is free, if you want it."

Headquarters bugles began to sound as she crossed the hall, jacket dangling over her arm, and pushed open the door of a darkened room. The air within was stifling, she opened a window and thrust back the blinds, and at the same moment the ringing crack of a rifled cannon shattered the silence of dawn. Very, very far away a dull boom replied.

Outside, in dusky obscurity, cavalry were mounting; a trooper, pumping water from a well under her window, sang quietly to him-

self in an undertone as he worked, then went off carrying two brimming buckets.

The sour, burned stench of stale campfires tainted the morning freshness.

She leaned on the sill, looking out into the east. Somewhere yonder, high against the sky, they were signaling with torches. She watched the red flames swinging to right, to left, dipping, circling; other sparks broke out to the north, where two army corps were talking to each other with fire.

As the sky turned gray, one by one the forest-shrouded hills took shape; details began to appear; woodlands grew out of fathomless shadows, fields, fences, a rocky hillock close by, trees in an orchard, some Sibley tents.

And with the coming of day a widening murmur grew out of the invisible, a swelling monotone through which, incessantly, near and distant, broken, cheery little flurries of bugle music, and far and farther still, where mists hung over a vast hollow in the hills, the dropping shots of the outposts thickened to a steady patter, running backward and forward, from east to west, as far as the ear could hear.

A soldier brought her some breakfast; later he came again with her saddlebags and a big

bucket of fresh water, taking away her riding habit and boots, which she thrust at him from the half-closed door.

Her bath was primitive enough; a sheet from the bed dried her, the saddlebags yielded some fresh linen, a pair of silk stockings and a comb.

Sitting there behind closed blinds, her smooth body swathed to the waist in a sheet, she combed out the glossy masses of her hair before braiding them once more around her temples; and her dark eyes watched daylight brighten between the slits in the blinds.

The cannonade was gradually becoming tremendous, the guns tuning up by batteries. There was, however, as yet, no platoon firing distinguishable through the sustained crackle of the fusillade; columns of dust, hanging above fields and woodlands, marked the courses of every northern road where wagons and troops were already moving west and south; the fog from the cannon turned the rising sun to a pulsating, cherry-tinted globe.

There was no bird music now from the orchard; here and there a scared oriole or robin flashed through the trees, winging its frightened way out of pandemonium.

The cavalry horses of the escort hung their heads, as though dully enduring the uproar: the horses of the field ambulances parked near the orchard were being backed into the shafts; the band of an infantry regiment, instruments flashing dully, marched up, halted, deposited trombone, clarion and bass drum on the grass and were told off as stretcher-bearers by a smart, Irish sergeant, who wore his cap over one ear.

The shock of the cannonade was terrific; the Special Messenger, buttoning her fresh linen, winced as window and door quivered under the pounding uproar. Then, dressed at last, she opened the shaking blinds and, seating herself by the window, laid her riding jacket across her knees.

There were rents and rips in sleeve and body, but she was not going to sew. On the contrary, she felt about with delicate, tentative fingers, searching through the loosened lining until she found what she was looking for, and, extracting it, laid it on her knees—a photograph, in a thin gold oval, covered with glass.

The portrait was that of a young man—thin, quaintly amused, looking out of the frame at her from behind his spectacles. The mustache

appeared to be slighter, the hair a trifle longer than the mustache and hair worn by the signal officer, Captain West. Otherwise, it was the man. And hope died in her breast without a flicker.

Sitting there by the shaking window, with the daguerreotype in her clasped hands, she looked at the summer sky, now all stained and polluted by smoke; the uproar of the guns seemed to be shaking her reason, the tumult within her brain had become chaos, and she scarcely knew what she did as, drawing on both gauntlets and fastening her soft riding hat, she passed through the house to the porch, where the staff officers were already climbing into their saddles. But the general, catching sight of her face at the door, swung his horse and dismounted, and came clanking back into the deserted hallway where she stood.

"What is it?" he asked, lowering his voice so she could hear him under the din of the cannonade.

"The Moray matter. . . . I want two troopers detailed."

"Have you nailed him?"

"Yes—I—" She faltered, staring fascinated at the distorted face, marred by a

sabre to the hideousness of doom itself. "Yes, I think so. I want two troopers—Burke and Campbell, of the escort, if you don't mind——"

"You can have a regiment! Is it far?"

"No." She steadied her voice with an effort.

"Near *my* headquarters?"

"Yes."

"Damnation!" he blazed out, and the oath seemed to shock her to self-mastery.

"Don't ask me now," she said. "If it's Moray, I'll get him. . . . What are those troops over there, General?" pointing through the doorway.

"The Excelsiors—Irish Brigade."

She nodded carelessly. "And where are the signal men? Where is your signal officer stationed—Captain——"

"Do you mean West? He's over on that knob, talking to Wilcox with flags. See him, up there against the sky?"

"Yes," she said.

The general's gimlet eyes seemed to bore through her. "Is that all?"

"All, thank you," she motioned with dry lips.

"Are you properly fixed? What do you carry—a revolver?"

She nodded in silence.

"All right. Your troopers will be waiting outside. . . . Get him, in one way or another; do you understand?"

"Yes."

A few moments later the staff galloped off and the escort clattered behind, minus two troopers, who sat on the edge of the veranda in their blue-and-yellow shell jackets, carbines slung, poking at the grass with the edges of their battered steel scabbards.

The Special Messenger came out presently, and the two troopers rose to salute. All around her thundered the guns; sky and earth were trembling as he led the way through an orchard heavy with green fruit. A volunteer nurse was gathering the hard little apples for cooking; she turned, her apron full, as the Special Messenger passed, and the two women, both young, looked at one another through the sunshine—looked, and turned away, each to her appointed destiny.

Smoke, drifting back from the batteries, became thicker beyond the orchard. Not very far away the ruddy sparkle of exploding Con-

federate shells lighted the obscurity. Farther beyond the flames of the Union guns danced red through the cannon gloom.

Higher on the hill, however, the air became clearer; a man outlined in the void was swinging signal flags against the sky.

"Wait here," said the Special Messenger to Troopers Burke and Campbell, and they unslung carbines, and leaned quietly against their feeding horses, watching her climb the crest.

The crest was bathed in early sunlight, an aërial island jutting up above a smoky sea. From the terrible, veiled maelstrom roaring below, battle thunder reverberated and the lightning of the guns flared incessantly.

For a moment, poised, she looked down into the inferno, striving to penetrate the hollow, then glanced out beyond, over fields and woods where sunlight patched the world beyond the edges of the dark pall.

Behind her Captain West, field glasses leveled, seemed to be intent upon his own business.

She sat down on the grassy acclivity. Below her, far below, Confederate shells were constantly striking the base of the hill. A

mile away black squares checkered a slope; beyond the squares a wood was suddenly belted with smoke, and behind her she heard the swinging signal flags begin to whistle and snap in the hill wind. She had sat there a long while before Captain West spoke to her, standing tall and thin beside her; some half-serious, half-humorous pleasantry—nothing for her to answer. But she looked up into his face, and he became silent, and after a while he moved away.

A little while later the artillery duel subsided and finally died out abruptly, leaving a comparative calm, broken only by slow and very deliberate picket firing.

The signal men laid aside their soiled flags and began munching hardtack; Captain West came over, bringing his own rations to offer her, but she refused with a gesture, sitting there, chin propped in her palms, elbows indenting her knees.

"Are you not hungry or thirsty?" he asked.

"No."

He had carelessly seated himself on the natural rocky parapet, spurred boots dangling over space. For one wild instant she hoped

he might slip and fall headlong—and his blood be upon the hands of his Maker.

Sitting near one another they remained silent, restless-eyed, brooding above the battle-scarred world. As he rose to go he spoke once or twice to her with that haunting softness of voice which had begun to torture her; but her replies were very brief; and he said nothing more.

At intervals during the afternoon orderlies came to the hill; one or two general officers and their staffs arrived for brief consultations, and departed at a sharp gallop down hill.

About three o'clock there came an unexpected roar of artillery from the Union left; minute by minute the racket swelled as battery after battery joined in the din.

Behind her the signal flags were fluttering wildly once more; a priest, standing near her, turned nodding:

"Our boys will be going in before sundown," he said quietly.

"Are you Father Corby, chaplain of the Excelsiors?"

"Yes, madam."

He lifted his hat and went away knee-deep through the windy hill-grasses; white butter-

flies whirled around him as he strode, head on his breast; the swift hill swallows soared and skimmed along the edges of the smoke as though inviting him. From her rocky height she saw the priest enter the drifting clouds.

A man going to his consecrated duty. And she? Where lay her duty? And why was she not about it?

"Captain West!" she called in a clear, hard voice.

Seated on his perch above the abyss, the officer lowered his field glasses and turned his face. Then he rose and moved over to where she was sitting. She stood up at once.

"Will you walk as far as those trees with me?" she asked. There was a strained ring to her voice.

He wheeled, spoke briefly to a sergeant, then, with that subtle and pleasant deference which characterized him, he turned and fell into step beside her.

"Is there anything I can do?" he asked softly.

"No. . . . God help us both."

He halted. At a nod from her, two troopers standing beside their quietly browsing horses, cocked carbines. The sharp, steel click of the

"Then, like a flesh his hand fell to his holster, and it was empty."

locks was perfectly audible through the din of the cannon.

The signal officer looked at her; and her face was whiter than his.

"You are Warren Moray—I think," she said.

His eyes glimmered like a bayonet in sunlight; then the old half-gay, half-defiant smile flickered over his face.

"Special Messenger," he said, "you come as a dark envoy for me. Now I understand your beauty—Angel of Death."

"Are you Major Moray: She could scarcely speak.

He smiled, glanced at the two troopers, and shrugged his shoulders. Then, like a flash his hand fell to his holster, and it was empty; and his pistol glimmered in her hand.

"For God's sake don't touch your sabre-hilt!" she said. . . . "Unclasp your belt! Let it fall!"

"Can't you give me a chance with those cavalrymen?"

"I can't. You know it."

"Yes; I know."

There was a silence; the loosened belt fell to the grass, the sabre clashing. He looked

coolly at the troopers, at her, and then out across the smoke.

"*This* way?" he said, as though to himself. "I never thought it." His voice was quiet and pleasant, with a slight touch of curiosity in it.

"How did you know?" he asked simply, turning to her again.

She stood leaning back against a tree, trying to keep her eyes fixed on him through the swimming weakness invading mind and body.

"I suppose this ends it all," he added absently; and touched the sabre lying in the grass with the tip of his spurred boot.

"Did you look for any other ending, Mr. Moray?"

"Yes—I did."

"How could you, coming into our ranks with a dead man's commission and forged papers? How long did you think it could last? Were you mad?"

He looked at her wistfully, smiled, and shook his head.

"Not mad, unless you are. Your risks are greater than were mine."

She straightened up, stepped toward him, very pale.

"Will you come?" she asked. "I am sorry."

"I am sorry—for us both," he said gently. "Yes, I will come. Send those troopers away."

"I cannot."

"Yes, you can. I give my word of honor."

She hesitated; a bright flush stained his face.

"I take your word," she murmured.

A moment later the troopers mounted and cantered off down the hill, veering wide to skirt the head of a column of infantry marching in; and when the Special Messenger started to return she found masses of men threatening to separate her from her prisoner —sunburnt, sweating, dirty-faced men, clutching their rifle-butts with red hands.

Their officers rode ahead, thrashing through the moist grass; a forest of bayonets swayed in the sun; flag after flag passed, slanting above the masses of blue.

She and her prisoner looked on; the flag of the 63d New York swept by; the flags of the 69th and 88th followed. A moment later the columns halted.

"Your Excelsiors," said Moray calmly.

"They're under fire already. Shall we move on?"

A soldier in the ranks, standing with ordered arms, fell straight backward, heavily; a corporal near them doubled up with a grunt.

The Special Messenger heard bullets smacking on rocks; heard their dull impact as they struck living bodies; saw them knock men flat. Meanwhile the flags drooped above the halted ranks, their folds stirred lazily, fell, and scarcely moved; the platoon fire rolled on unbroken somewhere out in the smoke yonder.

"God send me a bullet," said Moray. . . . "Why do you stay here?"

"To—give you—that chance."

"You run it, too."

"I hope so. I am very—tired."

"I am sorry," he said, reddening.

She said fiercely: "I wish it were over. . . . Life is cruel. . . . I suppose we must move on. Will you come, please?"

"Yes—my dark messenger," he said under his breath, and smiled.

A priest passed them in the smoke; her prisoner raised his hand to the visor of his cap.

"Father Corby, their chaplain," she murmured.

"Attention! Attention!" a far voice cried, and the warning ran from rank to rank, taken up in turn by officer after officer. Father Corby was climbing to the summit of a mound close by; an order rang out, bugles repeated it, and the blue ranks faced their chaplain.

Then the priest from his rocky pulpit raised his ringing voice in explanation. He told the three regiments of the Irish Brigade—now scarcely more than three battalions of two companies each—that every soldier there could receive the benefit of absolution by making a sincere act of contrition and resolving, on first opportunity, to confess.

He told them that they were going to be sent into battle; he urged them to do their duty; reminded them of the high and sacred nature of their trust as soldiers of the Republic, and ended by warning them that the Catholic Church refuses Christian burial to him who deserts his flag.

In the deep, battle-filled silence the priest raised up his hands; three regiments sank to their knees as a single man, and the Special Messenger and her prisoner knelt with them.

"*Dominus noster Jesus Christus vos ab-*

solvat, et ego, auctoritate ipius, vos absolvo ab omvir vinculo——"

The thunder of the guns drowned the priest's voice for a moment, then it sounded again, firm and clear:

"*Absolvo vos a peccatis——*"

The roar of battle blotted out the words; then again they rang out:

"*In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti! . . . Amen.*"

The officers had remounted now, their horses plunging in the smoke; the flags were moving forward; rivers of bayonets flowed out into the maelstrom where the red lightning played incessantly. Then from their front crashed out the first volley of the Irish Brigade.

"Forward! Forward!" shouted their officers. Men were falling everywhere; a dying horse kicked a whole file into confusion. Suddenly a shell fell in their midst, another, another, tearing fiery right of way.

The Special Messenger, on her knees in the smoke, looked up and around as a priest bent above her.

"Child," he said, "what are you doing here?" And then his worn gaze fell on the

dead man who lay in the grass staring skyward through his broken eyeglasses with pleasant, sightless eyes.

The Special Messenger, white to the lips, looked up: "We were on our knees together, Father Corby. You had said the amen, and the bullet struck him—here! . . . He had no chance for confession. . . . But you said——"

Her voice failed.

The priest looked at her; she took the dead man's right hand in hers.

"He was a brave man, Father. . . . And you said—you said—about those who fell fighting for—their *own* land—absolution—Christian burial——"

She choked, set her teeth in her under lip and looked down at the dead. The priest knelt, too.

"Is—is all well with him?" she whispered.

"Surely, child——"

"But—his was the—*other* flag."

There was a silence.

"Father?"

"I know—I know. . . . The banner of Christ is broader. . . . You say he was kneeling here beside you?"

"Here—so close that I touched him. . . .

And then you said. . . . Christian burial—absolution——"

"He was a spy?"

"What am I, Father?"

"Absolved, child—like this poor boy, here at your feet. . . . What is that locket in your hand?"

"His picture. . . . I found it in his house when the cavalry were setting fire to it. . . . Oh, I am tired of it all—deathly, deathly sick! . . . Look at him lying here? Father, Father, is there no end to death?"

The priest rose wearily; through the back-drifting smoke the long battle line of the Excelsiors wavered like phantoms in the mist. Six flags flapped ghostlike above them, behind them men writhed in the trampled, bloody grass; before them the sheeted volleys rushed outward into darkness, where the dull battle lightning played.

A maimed, scorched, blackened thing in the grass near by was calling on Christ; the priest went to him, turning once on his way to look back where the Special Messenger knelt beside a dead man who lay smiling at nothing through his shattered eyeglasses.

IV

ROMANCE

THE Volunteer Nurse sighed and spread out her slender, iodine-stained fingers on both knees, looking down at them reflectively.

"It is different now," she said; "sentiment dies under the scalpel. In the filth and squalor of reality neither the belief in romance nor the capacity for desiring it endure long. . . . Even pity becomes atrophied—or at least a reflex habit; sympathy, sorrow, remain as mechanical reactions, not spontaneous

emotions. . . . You can understand that, dear?"

"Partly," said the Special Messenger, raising her dark eyes to her old schoolmate.

"In the beginning," said the Nurse, dreamily, "the men in their uniforms, the drums and horses and glitter, and the flags passing, and youth—*youth*—not that you and I are yet old in years; do you know what I mean?"

"I know," said the Special Messenger, smoothing out her riding gloves. "Do you remember the cadets at Oxley? You loved one of them."

"Yes; you know how it was in the cities; and even afterward in Washington—I mean the hospitals after Bull Run. Young bravery—the Zouaves—the multicolored guard regiments—and a romance in every death!" She laid one stained hand over the other, fingers still wide. "But here in this blackened horror they call the 'seat of war'—this festering bull-pen, choked with dreary regiments, all alike, all in filthy blue—here individuals vanish, men vanish. The schoolgirl dream of man dies here forever. Only unwashed, naked duty remains; and its inspiration, man—bloody, dirty, vermin-covered, terrible — sometimes;

and sometimes whimpering, terrified, flinching, base, bereft of all his sex's glamour, all his mystery, shorn of authority, devoid of pride, pitiable, screaming under the knife.—It is different now," said the pretty Volunteer Nurse. —" The war kills more than human life."

The Special Messenger drew her buckskin gloves carefully through her belt and buttoned the holster of her revolver.

" I have seen war, too," she said; " and the men who dealt death and the men who received it. Their mystery remains—the glamour of a man remains for me—because he is a man."

" I have heard them crying like children in the stretchers."

" So have I. That solves nothing."

But the Nurse went on:

" And in the wards they are sometimes something betwixt devils and children. All the weakness and failings they attribute to women come out in them—fear, timidity, inconsequence, greed, malice, gossip! And, as for courage—I tell you, women bear pain better."

" Yes, I have learned that. . . . It is not difficult to beguile them either; to lead them, to

read them. That is part of my work. I do it. I know they *are* afraid in battle—the intelligent ones. Yet they fight. I know they are really children—impulsive, passionate, selfish, often cruel—but, after all, they are here fighting this war—here encamped all around us throughout these hills and forests. . . . They have lost none of their glamour for me. Their mystery remains."

The Volunteer Nurse looked up with a tired smile:

"You always were emotional, dear."

"I am still."

"You don't have to drain wounds and dry out sores and do the thousand unspeakable offices that we do."

"Why do you do them?"

"I have to."

"You didn't have to enlist. Why did you?"

"Why do the men enlist?" asked the Nurse. "That's why you and I did—whatever the motive may have been, God knows. . . . And it's killed part of me. . . . *You* don't cleanse ulcers."

"No; I am not fitted. I tried; and lost none of the romance in me. Only it happens that I can do—what I am doing—better."

The Nurse looked at her a trifle awed.

"To think, dear, that you should turn out to be the celebrated Special Messenger. You were timid in school."

"I am now. . . . You don't know how afraid a woman can be. Suppose in school—suppose that for one moment we could have foreseen our destiny—here together, you and I, as we are now."

The Nurse looked into the stained hollow of her right hand.

"I had the lines read once," she said drearily, "but nobody ever said I'd be here, or that there'd be any war." And she continued to examine her palm with a hurt expression in her blue eyes.

The Special Messenger laughed, and her lovely, pale face lighted up with color.

"Don't you really think you are ever going to be capable of caring for a man again?"

"No, I don't. I know now how they're fashioned, how they think—how—how revolting they can be. . . . No, no! It's all gone—all the ideals, all the dreams. . . . Good Heavens, how romantic—how senseless we were in school!"

"I am still," said the Special Messenger

thoughtfully. "I like men. . . . A man—the right one—could easily make me love him. And I am afraid there are more than one 'right one.' I have often been on the sentimental border. . . . But they died, or went away—or I did. . . . The trouble with me is, as you say, that I am emotional, and very, very tender-hearted. . . . It is sometimes difficult to be loyal—to care for duty—to care for the Union more than for a man. Not that there is any danger of my proving untrue——"

"No," murmured the Nurse; "loyalty is your inheritance."

"Yes, we—" she named her family under her breath—" are traditionally trustworthy. It is part of us—our race was always, will always be. . . . But—to see a man near death—and to care for him a little—even a rebel—and to know that one word might save him—only one little disloyal word!"

"No man would save *you* at that expense," said the Nurse disdainfully. "I know men."

"Do you? I don't—in that way. There was once an officer—a non-combatant. I could have loved him. . . . Once there was a Confederate cavalryman. I struck him

senseless with my revolver-butt—and I might have—cared for him. He was very young. . . . I never can forget him. It is hard, dear, the business I am engaged in. . . . But it has never spoiled my interest in men—or my capacity for loving one of them. I am afraid I am easily moved."

She rose and stood erect, to adjust her soft riding hat, her youthfully slender figure in charming relief against the window.

"Won't you let me brew a little tea for you?" asked the Nurse. "Don't leave me so soon."

"When do you go on duty?"

"In about ten minutes. It will be easier to-morrow, when we send our sick North. Will you come in to-morrow?"

The Special Messenger shook her head dreamily.

"I don't know—I don't know. . . . Good-by."

"Are *you* going on duty?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Now."

The Nurse rose and put both arms around her.

"I am so afraid for you," she said; "and it has been so good to see you. . . . I don't know whether we'll ever meet again——"

Her voice was obliterated in the noisy outburst of bugles sounding the noon sick-call.

They went out together, where the Messenger's horse was tied under the trees. Beyond, through the pines, glimmered the tents of an emergency hospital. And now, in the open air not very far away, they could hear picket firing.

"Do be careful," said the blue-eyed Nurse. "They say you do such audacious things; and every day somebody says you have been taken, or hanged, or shot. Dear, you are so young and so pretty——"

"So are you. Don't catch fever or smallpox or die from a scratch from a poisoned knife. . . . Good-by once more."

They kissed each other. A hospital orderly, passing hurriedly, stopped to hold her stirrup; she mounted, thanked the orderly, waved a smiling adieu to her old schoolmate, and, swinging her powerful horse westward, trotted off through the woods, passing the camp sentinels with a nod and a low-spoken word.

Farther out in the woods she encountered

the first line of pickets; showed her credentials, then urged her horse forward at a gallop.

"Not that way!" shouted an officer, starting to run after her; "the Johnnies are out there!"

She turned in her saddle and nodded reassuringly, then spurred on again, expecting to jump the Union advance-guard every moment.

There seemed to be no firing anywhere in the vicinity; nothing to be seen but dusky pine woods; and after she had advanced almost to the edge of a little clearing, and not encountering the outer line of Union pickets, she drew bridle and sat stock still in her saddle, searching in every direction with alert eyes.

Nothing moved; the heated scent of the Southern pines hung heavy in the forest; in the long, dry swale-grass of the clearing, yellow butterflies were flying lazily; on a dead branch above her a huge woodpecker, with pointed, silky cap, uttered a querulous cry from moment to moment.

She strained her dainty, close-set ears; no sound of man stirred in this wilderness—only the lonely bird-cry from above; only the ceaseless monotone of the pine crests stirred by some high breeze unfelt below.

A forest path, apparently leading west, attracted her attention; into this she steered her horse and continued, even after her compass had warned her that the path was now running directly south.

The tree-growth was younger here; thickets of laurel and holly grew in the undergrowth, and, attempting a short cut out, she became entangled. For a few minutes her horse, stung by the holly, thrashed and floundered about in the maze of tough stems; and when at last she got him free, she was on the edge of another clearing—a burned one, lying like a path of black velvet in the sun. A cabin stood at the farther edge.

Three forest bridle paths ran west, east, and south from this blackened clearing. She unbuttoned her waist, drew out a map, and, flattening it on her pommel, bent above it in eager silence. And, as she sat studying her map, she became aware of a tremor in the solid earth under her horse's feet. It grew to a dull jarring vibration—nearer—nearer—nearer—and she hastily backed her horse into the depths of the laurel, sprang to the ground, and placed both gauntleted hands over her horse's nostrils.

A moment later the Confederate cavalry swept through the clearing at a trot—a jaunty, gray column, riding two abreast, then falling into single file as they entered the bridle path at a canter.

She watched them as they flashed by among the pines, sitting their horses beautifully, the wind lifting the broad brims of their soft hats, the sun a bar of gold across each sunburned face.

There were only a hundred of them—probably some of Ashby's old riders, for they seemed strangely familiar—but it was not long before they had passed on their gay course, and the last tremor in the forest soil —the last distant rattle of sabre and carbine —died away in the forest silence.

What were they doing here? She did not know. There seemed no logical reason for the presence of Stuart's troopers.

For a while, awaiting their possible collision with the Union outposts, she listened, expecting the far rattle of rifles. No sound came. They must have sheered off east. So, very calmly she addressed herself to the task in hand.

This must be the burned clearing: her map

and the cabin corroborated her belief. Then it was here that she was to meet this unknown man in Confederate uniform and Union pay—a spy like herself—and give him certain information and receive certain information in return.

Her instructions had been unusually rigid; she was to take every precaution; use native disguise whether or not it might appear necessary, carry no papers, and let any man she might encounter make the advances until she was absolutely certain of him. For there was an ugly rumor afloat that the man she expected had been caught and hanged, and that a Confederate might attempt to impersonate him. So she looked very carefully at her map, then out of the thicket at the burned clearing. There was the wretched cabin named as rendezvous, the little garden patch with standing corn and beans, and here and there a yellowing squash.

Why had the passing rebel cavalry left all that good food undisturbed?

Fear, which within her was always latent, always too ready to influence her by masquerading as caution, stirred now. For almost an hour she stood, balancing her field glasses

across her saddle, eyes focused on the open cabin door. Nothing stirred there.

At last, with a slight shiver, she opened her saddle bags and drew out the dress she meant to wear—a dingy, earth-colored thing of gingham.

Deep in the thicket she undressed, folded her fine linen and silken stockings, laid them away in the saddle bags together with waist and skirt, field glasses, gauntlets, and whip, and the map and papers, which latter, while affording no information to the enemy, would certainly serve to convict her.

Dressed now in the scanty, colorless clothing of a "poor white" of the pine woods, limbs and body tanned with walnut, her slender feet rubbed in dust and then thrust stockingless into shapeless shoes, she let down the dark, lustrous mass of her hair, braided it, tied it with faded ribbon, rubbed her hands in wood mold and crushed green leaves over them till they seemed all stained and marred with toil. Then she gathered an armful of splinter wood.

Now ready, she tethered her horse, leaving him bitted and saddled; spread out his sack of feed, turned and looked once more at the

cabin, then walked noiselessly to the clearing's edge, carrying her aromatic splinters.

Underfoot, as she crossed it, the charred grass crumbled to powder; three wild doves flickered up into flight, making a soft clatter and displaying the four white feathers. A quail called from the bean patch.

The heat was intense in the sun; perspiration streaked her features; her tender feet burned; the cabin seemed a long way off, a wavering blot through the dancing heat devils playing above the fire-scorched open.

Head bent, she moved on in the shiftless, hopeless fashion of the sort of humanity she was representing, furtively taking her bearings and making such sidelong observations as she dared. To know the shortest way back to her horse might mean life to her. She understood that. Also she fully realized that she might at that very instant be under hostile observation. In her easily excited imagination, all around her the forest seemed to conceal a hundred malevolent eyes. She shivered slightly, wiped the perspiration from her brow with one small bare fist, and plodded on, clutching her lightwood to her rounded breast.

And now at last she was nearing the open cabin door; and she must not hesitate, must show no suspicion. So she went in, dragging her clumsily-shod feet.

A very young man in the uniform of a Confederate cavalry officer was seated inside before the empty fireplace of baked clay. He had a bad scar on his temple. She looked at him, simulating dull surprise; he rose and greeted her gracefully.

"Howdy," she murmured in response, still staring.

"Is this your house?" he asked.

"Suh?" blankly.

"Is this your house?"

"I reckon," she nodded. "How come you-all in my house?"

He replied with another question:

"What were you doing in the woods?"

"Lightwood," she answered briefly, stacking the fragrant splinters on the table.

"Do you live here all alone?"

"Reckon I'm alone when I live heah," sullenly.

"What is your name?" He had a trick of coloring easily.

"What may be *yoh* name, suh?" she re-

torted with a little flash of Southern spirit, never entirely quenched even in such as she seemed to be.

Genuine surprise brought the red back into his face and made it, worn as it was, seem almost handsome. The curious idea came to her that she had seen him before somewhere. At the same moment speech seemed to tremble on his lips; he hesitated, looked at her with a new and sudden keenness, and stood looking.

"I expected to meet somebody here," he said at length.

She did not seem to comprehend.

"I expected to meet a woman here."

"Who? Me?" incredulously.

He looked her over carefully; looked at her dusty bare ankles, at her walnut-smeared face and throat. She seemed so small, so round-shouldered—so different from what he had expected. They had said that the woman he must find was pretty.

"Was yuh-all fixin' to meet up with *me*?" she repeated with a bold laugh.

"I—don't know," he said. "By the Eternal, I don't know, ma'am. But I'm going to find out in right smart time. Did you ever hear anybody speak Latin?"

"Suh?" blankly; and the audacity faded.

"Latin," he repeated, a trifle discomfited. "For instance, '*sic itur*.' Do you know what '*sic itur*' means?"

"Sick—what, suh?"

"'*Sic itur!*' Oh, Lord, she *is* what she looks like!" he exclaimed in frank despair. He walked to the door, wheeled suddenly, came back, and confronted her.

"Either, ma'am, you are the most consummate actress in this war drama, or you don't know what I'm saying, and you think me crazy. . . . And now I'll ask you once for all: *Is this the road?*"

The Special Messenger looked him full in the eyes; then, as by magic, the loveliest of smiles transfigured the dull, blank features; her round shoulders, pendulous arms, slouching pose, melted into superb symmetry, quickening with grace and youth as she straightened up and faced him, erect, supple, laughing, adorable.

"*Sic itur—ad Astra,*" she said demurely, and offered him her hand. "Continue," she added.

He neither stirred nor spoke; a deep flush mounted to the roots of his short, curly hair.

She smiled encouragement, thinking him young and embarrassed, and a trifle chagrined.

"Continue the Latin formula," she nodded, laughing; "what follows, if you please——"

"Good God!" he broke out hoarsely.

And suddenly she knew there was nothing to follow except death—his or hers—realized she made an awful mistake—divined in one dreadful instant the unsuspected counter-mine beneath her very feet—cried out as she struck him full in the face with clenched fist, sprang back, whipping the revolver from her ragged bodice, dark eyes ablaze.

"Now," she panted, "hands high—and turn your back! Quickly!"

He stood still, very pale, one sun-burned hand covering the cheek which she had struck. There was blood on it. He heard her breathless voice, warning him to obey, but he only took his hand from his face, looked at the blood on palm and finger, then turned his hopeless eyes on her.

"Too late," he said heavily. "But—I'd rather be you than I. . . . Look out of that window, Messenger!"

"Put up your hands!"

"No."

"Will you hold up your hands!"

"No, Messenger. . . . And I — didn't — know it was *you* when I came here. It's—it's a dirty business—for an officer." He sank down on the wooden chair, resting his head between both hands. A single drop of blood fell brightly from his cut cheek.

The Special Messenger stole a swift, sidelong glance toward the window, hesitated, and, always watching him, slid along the wall toward the door, menacing him at every step with leveled revolver. Then, at the door, she cast one rapid glance at the open field behind her and around. A thrill of horror stiffened her. The entire circle of the burned clearing was ringed with the gray pickets of rebel cavalry.

The distant men sat motionless on their horses, carbine on thigh. Here and there a distant horse tossed his beautiful head, or perhaps some hat-brim fluttered. There was no other movement, not one sound.

Crouching to pass the windows beneath the sills she crept, heedless of her prisoner, to the rear door. That avenue to the near clustering woods was closed, too; she saw the glitter of carbines above the laurel.

"Special Messenger?" She turned toward

him, pale as a ghost. "I reckon we've got you."

"Yes," she said.

There was another chair by the table—the only other one. She seated herself, shaking all over, laid her revolver on the table, stared at the weapon, pushed it from her with a nervous shudder, and, ashy of lip and cheek, looked at the man she had struck.

"Will they—hang me?"

"I reckon, ma'am. They hung the other one—the man you took me for."

"Will there be a—trial?"

"Drumhead. . . . They've been after you a long, long while."

"Then—what are you waiting for?"

He was silent.

She found it hard to control the nervous tremor of her limbs and lips. The dryness in her throat made speech difficult.

"Then—if there is no chance——"

He bent forward swiftly and snatched her revolver from the table as her small hand fell heavily upon the spot where the weapon had rested.

"Would you do *that?*" he said in a low voice.

The desperate young eyes answered him. And, after a throbbing silence: "Won't you let me?" she asked. "It is indecent to h-hang a—woman—before—men——"

He did not answer.

"Please—please—" she whispered, "give it back to me—if you are a—soldier. . . . You can go to the door and call them. . . . Nobody will know. . . . You can turn your back. . . . It will only take a second!"

A big blue-bottle fly came blundering into the room and filled the silence with its noise. Years ago the big blue flies sometimes came into the quiet schoolroom; and how everybody giggled when the taller Miss Poucher, bristling from her prunella shoes to her stiff side-curls, charged indignantly upon the buzzing intruder.

Dry-eyed, dry-lipped, the Messenger straightened up, quivering, and drew a quick, sharp breath; then her head fell forward, and, resting inert upon the table, she buried her face in her arms. The most dangerous spy in the Union service—the secret agent who had worked more evil to the Confederacy than any single Union army corps—the coolest, most resourceful, most trusted messenger on either

side as long as the struggle lasted—caught at last.

The man, young, Southern, and a gentleman's son, sat staring at her. He had driven his finger-nails deep into his palms, bitten his underlip till it was raw.

"Messenger!"

She made no response.

"Are you afraid?"

Her head, prone in her arms, motioned dull negation. It was a lie and he knew it. He looked at the slender column of the neck—stained to a delicate amber—at the nape; and he thought of the rope and the knot under the left ear.

"Messenger," he said once more. "I did not know it was *you* I was to meet. Look at me, in God's name!"

She opened her eyes on him, then raised her head.

"Do you know me now?" he asked.

"No."

"Look!"

He touched the scar on his forehead; but there was no recognition in her eyes.

"Look, I tell you!" he repeated, almost fiercely.

She said wearily: "I have seen so many men—so many men. . . . I can't remember you."

"And I have seen many women, Messenger; but I have never forgotten you—or what you did—or what you did——"

"I?"

"You. . . . And from that night I have lived only to find you again. And—oh, God! To find you here! My Messenger! My little Messenger!"

"Who are you?" she whispered, leaning forward on the table, dark eyes dilating with hope.

He sat heavily for a while, head bowed as though stunned to silence; then slowly the white misery returned to his face and he looked up.

"So—after all—*you* have forgotten. And my romance is dead."

She did not answer, intent now on every word, every shade of his expression. And, as she looked, through the numbness of her desperation, hope stirred again, stealthily.

"Are you a friend?" Her voice scarcely sounded at all.

"Friends die for each other," he said. "Do you expect that of me?"

The silence between them became terrible; and at last he broke it with a bitter laugh:

"You once turned a boy's life to romance—riding through it—out of it—leaving scars on his brow and heart—and on his lips the touch of your own. And on his face your tears. Look at me once more!"

Her breath came quicker; far within her somewhere memory awoke, groping blindly for light.

"Three days we followed you," he said. "On the Pennsylvania line we cornered you; but you changed garb and shape and speech, almost under our eyes—as a chameleon changes color, matching the leaf it hides on. . . . I halted at that squatter's house—sure of you at last—and the pretty squatter's daughter cooked for us while we hunted you in the hills—and when I returned she gave me her bed to sleep on——"

Her hand caught at her throat and she half rose, staring at him.

"Her own bed to sleep on," he repeated. "And I had been three days in the saddle; and I ate what she set before me, and slept on her bed—fell asleep—only a tired boy, not a soldier any longer. . . . And awoke to meet

your startled eyes—to meet the blow from your revolver butt that made this scar—to fall back bewildered for a moment—half-stunned —Messenger! Do you know me now?"

"Yes," she said.

They looked breathlessly at one another; suddenly a hot blush covered her neck and face; and his eyes flashed triumph.

"You have *not* forgotten!" he cried.

And there, on the very edge of death itself, the bright shame glowed and glowed in her cheeks, and her distressed eyes fell before his.

"You kissed me," he said, looking at her.

"I—I thought I had—killed you—" she stammered.

"And you kissed me on the lips. . . . In that moment of peril you waited to do that. Your tears fell on my face. I felt them. And I tell you that, even had I been lying there dead instead of partly stunned, I would have known what you did to me after you struck me down."

Her head sank lower; the color ran riot from throat to brow.

He spoke again, quietly, yet a strange undertone of exaltation thrilled his voice and transfigured the thin, war-worn features she

had forgotten, so that, as she lifted her eyes to him again, the same boy looked back at her from the mist of the long dead years.

"Messenger," he said, "I have never forgotten. And now it is too late to forget your tears on my face—the touch of your lips on mine. I would not if I could. . . . It was worth living for — dying for. . . . Once — I hoped—some day—after this—all this trouble ended—my romance might come—true——"

The boy choked, then:

"I came here under orders to take a woman spy whose password was the key to a Latin phrase. But until you stood straight in your rags and smiled at me, I did not know it was you—I did not know I was to take the Special Messenger! Do you believe me?"

"Yes."

The boy colored painfully. Then a queer, pallid change came over his face; he rose, bent over her where she rested heavily on the table:

"Little Messenger," he said, "I am in your debt for two blows and a kiss."

She lifted a dazed face to meet his gaze; he trembled, leaned down, and kissed her on the mouth.

Then in one bound he was at the door, sig-

naling his troopers with drawn sabre—as once, long ago, she had seen him signal them in the Northern woods.

And, through the window, she saw the scattered cavalry forming column at a gallop, obeying every sabre signal, trotting forward, wheeling fours right—and then—and then! the gray column swung into the western forest at a canter, and was gone!

The boy leaning in the doorway looked back at her over his shoulder and sheathed his sabre. There was not a vestige of color left in his face.

"Go!" he said hoarsely.

"What?" she faltered.

"Go—go, in God's name! There's a door there! Can't you see it?"

She had been gone for a full hour when at last he turned again. A bit of faded ribbon from her hair lay on the table. It was tied in a true lover's knot.

He walked over, looked at it, drew it through his buttonhole and went slowly back to the door again. For a long while he stood there, vague-eyed, silent. It was nearly sunset when once more he drew his sabre, exam-

ined it carefully, bent it over one knee, and snapped the blade in two.

Then, with a last look at the sky, and standing very erect, he closed the door, set his back firmly against it, drew his revolver, and looked curiously into the muzzle.

A moment later the racket of the shot echoed through the deserted house.

V

RED FERRY

WHEN Private Allen of Kay's Cavalry deserted with headquarters' dispatch pouch, and headed straight for Dixie, there was a great deal of consternation and excitement on the north bank of the river, and a considerable amount of headlong riding. But on the tenth day he slipped through the cordon, got into the woods, and was making for the river when a patrol shot at him near Gopher Creek, but lost him in the impenetrable cypress swamp beyond.

However, the pursuit was pushed forward to the very edge of the enemy's country; Kay's troopers patrolled the north bank of the river and watched every road and ford; east and west Ripley's and Haynes's brigades formed impassable curtains.

Somewhere in this vast corral lay hidden a desperate, starving man; and it was only a question of time before the hunted creature broke cover for the water.

That a trooper had deserted with arms and equipment was generally known; but that, in his nocturnal flight, he had also taken vitally important papers was known at first only to Kay and later to the Special Messenger, who was sent to him post-haste from corps headquarters when the fugitive headed for the river.

Now, the south bank of the stream being in the enemy's territory, Kay had not ventured to station patrols above the clay banks opposite, lest rumor of invasion bring Stuart's riders to complicate a man chase and the man escape in the confusion.

And he explained this to the Special Messenger at their first conference.

"It ought to be guarded," insisted the Mes-

senger tranquilly. "There are three good fords and a ferry open to him."

"I hold the fords on this side," argued Kay; "the ferryboat lies in the eel-grass on the south shore."

"Stuart's riders might cross if they heard of this trouble, sir!"

"And if they see Union troops on the south bank they'll cross, sure pop. It won't do, Messenger. If that fellow attempts the fords we'll catch him, sure; if he swims we may get him in the water. The Lord knows I want him badly, but I dare not invite trouble by placing vedettes across the stream. . . . There's a ferryman over there I'm worried about, too. He'd probably come across if Allen hailed him from the woods. . . . And Allen was thick with him. They used to fish together. Nobody knows what they hatched out between them. It worries me, I can tell you—that ferry."

The Messenger walked to the tent door and looked thoughtfully at the woods around her. The colonel rose from his camp stool and followed her, muttering:

"I might as well try to catch a weasel in a wall, or a red horse in the mud; and how to

go about it I don't know." With set jaws and an angry spot glowing in his gaunt cheeks, he stared wickedly around him and then at the Messenger. "*You* do miracles, they say. Can't you do one now?"

"I don't know, sir. Who is this deserter?"

"Roy Allen—a sullen, unwilling dog—always malingering. He's spent half the time in the guardhouse, half in the hospital, since he arrived with the recruits. Somebody got an idea that he'd been hit by the sun, but it's all bosh. He's a bad one—that's all. Can you help me out?"

The Messenger nodded.

"You say he's fond of fishing?"

"Crazy about it. He was often detailed to keep us in food when rations ran low. Then the catfish made us sick, so I stopped his fishing. Then he took French leave."

"I want two troopers this evening, Colonel. May I have them?" she asked thoughtfully. "I'm going to keep house at Red Ferry for a while."

"All right, ma'am. Look out for him; he's a bad one."

But the Messenger shook her head, smiling.

At ten o'clock that night the Special Mes-

senger, mounted astride and followed by two cavalrymen with carbines, rode down through the river mist to Bushy Ford.

Daintily her handsome horse set foot in the water, hesitated, bent his long, velvety neck, sniffed, and finally drank; then, satisfied, stepped quietly forward, hock-deep, in the swirling, yellow flood.

"Foller them stakes, Miss," cautioned the older trooper; "I sot 'em m'self, I did."

"Thank you. Keep close to me, Connor. I've crossed here before it was staked."

"Sho!" exclaimed Connor under his breath; "she do beat 'em all!"

Twice, having no light but the foggy stars, they missed the stakes and her horse had to swim, but they managed to flounder safely back to the ford each time; and after a little while her mount rose, straining through the red mud of the shore, struggled, scrambled madly, and drew out, dripping.

Up a slippery, crooked ascent they rode, out into a field of uncut corn above, then, spurring, swung at a canter eastward along the river.

There was a dim light in the ferry house; a lubberly, fat man ran to the open door as they

drew bridle before it. When the fat man saw the blue troopers he backed hastily away from the sill! and the Messenger dismounted and followed him into the house, heavy revolver swinging in her gloved hand.

"What'n hell y'goin' to do to me?" he began to whimper; "I ain't done nothin'"; but an access of fright strangled him, and he continued to back away from her until he landed flat against the opposite wall. She followed and halted before him, cocking her weapon, with a terrible frown. She said solemnly:

"I want you to answer me one or two questions, and if you lie to me it will be the last time. Do you understand?"

He nodded and moistened his thick lips, gulping.

"Then you are the ferryman, Snuyder, are you not?"

He nodded, utterly incapable of speech. She went on, gloomily:

"You used to fish sometimes with a Yankee recruit named Allen—Roy Allen?"

"Ye-s'm," he sniveled. "There's my fish-pole an' his'n layin' onto the roof——"

"How did he hail you when he wanted you to come across to take him fishing?"

"He jest come down to the shore an' hollered twicet——"

She bent closer, scanning his dilated eyes; speech died on his lips.

"How did he call to you at *night?*"

"He ain't never called me at night—so help me——"

"No; *but in case he ever wished to fish at night?*"

The man began to stammer and protest, but she covered him suddenly, and her dark eyes struck fire.

"What signal?" she asked with a menacing ring in her voice. "Quick!"

"Cock-o'-the-pines! . . . It didn't mean nothin'," gasped the man; . . . "It was jest private—between fishin' friends——"

"Go on!"

"Yes'm. . . . If I heard a cock-o'-the-pines squeal I was to squeal back, an' then he was to holler—jest friendly—'Hallo-oo! How's fishin'?' That's all, ma'am——"

"And you were to cross?"

"Yes'm—jest friendly like. Him an' me was fond o' fishin'——"

"I see. Sit down and don't move. Nobody is going to hurt you."

She went to the door, leisurely uncocking her revolver and pushing it through her belt.

"Oh, Connor," she called carelessly, "please mount my friend Mr. Snuyder on my horse, take him across the ford, and detain him as my guest at headquarters until I return. Wait a second; I'm going to keep my saddlebags with me."

And a few minutes later, as the troopers rode away in the mist with their prisoner, her gentle voice followed them:

"Don't be rough with him, Connor. Say to the colonel that there is no harm in him at all, but keep him in sight until I return; and *don't* let him go fishing!"

She began housekeeping at sunrise by taking a daring bath in the stream, then, dressing, she made careful inventory of the contents of the house and a cautious survey of the immediate environment.

The premises, so unexpectedly and unwillingly abandoned by its late obese tenant, harbored, besides herself, only one living creature —a fat kitten.

The ferry house stood above the dangerous

south bank of the river in a grove of oaks, surrounded for miles by open country.

A flight of rickety, wooden stairs pitched downward from the edge of the grassy bank to a wharf at the water's edge—the mere skeleton of a wharf now, outlined only by decaying stringpieces. But here the patched-up punt was moored; and above it, nailed to a dead tree, the sign with its huge lettering still remained:

RED FERRY
HOLLER TWICE

sufficiently distinct to be deciphered from the opposite shore. Sooner or later the fugitive would have to come to the river. Probably the cavalry would catch him at one of the fords, or some rifleman might shoot him swimming. But, if he did not know the fords, and could not swim, there was only one ferry for him; east, west, and north he had long since been walled in. The chances were that some night a cock-o'-the-pines would squeal from the woods across the river, and then she knew what to do.

During those broiling days of waiting she had leisure enough. Seated outside her shanty, in the shade of the trees, where she was able to keep watch both ways—south for her own safety's sake, north for the doomed man — she occupied herself with mending stockings and underwear, raising her eyes at intervals to sweep the landscape.

Nobody came into that heated desolation; neither voice nor gunshot echoed far or near. Day after day the foliage of the trees spread motionless under cloudless skies; day after day the oily river slipped between red mud banks in heated silence. In sky, on earth, nothing stirred except, at intervals, some buzzard turning, high in the blinding blue; below, all was deathly motionless, save when a clotted cake of red clay let go, sliding greasily into the current. At dawn the sun struck the half-stunned world insensible once more; no birds stirred even at sunset; all the little creatures of the field seemed dead; her kitten panted in its slumbers.

Every night the river fog shrouded the land, wetting the parched leaves; dew drummed on the rotting porch like the steady patter of picket-firing; the widow bird's dis-

tracted mourning filled the silence; the kitten crept to its food, ate indifferently, then, settling on the Messenger's knees, stared, round-eyed, at the dark. But always at dawn the sun burned off the mist, rising in stupefying splendor; the oily river glided on; not a leaf moved, not a creature. And the kitten slept on the porch, heedless of inviting grass stems whisked for her and the ball of silk rolled past her in temptation.

Half lying there, propped against a tree trunk in the heated shade, cotton bodice open, sleeves rolled to the shoulders, the Special Messenger mended her linen with languid fingers. Perspiration powdered her silky skin from brow to breast, from finger to elbow, shimmering like dew when she moved. Her dark hair fell, unbound; glossy tendrils of it curled on her shoulders, framing a face in which nothing as yet had extinguished the soft loveliness of youth.

At times she talked to the kitten under her breath; sometimes hummed an old song. Memories kept her busy, too, at moments quenching the brightness of her eyes, at moments twitching the edges of her vivid lips till the dreamy smile transfigured her.

But always quietly alert, her eyes scanned land and river, the bank opposite, the open fields behind her. Once, certain of a second's safety, she relaxed with a sigh, stretching out full length on the grass; and, under the edge of her cotton skirt, the metal of a revolver glimmered for an instant, strapped in its holster below her right knee.

The evening of the fourth day was cooler; the kitten hoisted its tail for the first time in their acquaintance, and betrayed a feeble interest in the flight of a white dusk-moth that came hovering around the porch vines.

"Pussy," said the Messenger, "there's bacon in that well pit; I am going to make a fire and fry some."

The kitten mewed faintly.

"I thought you'd approve, dear. Cold food is bad in hot weather; and we'll fry a little cornmeal, too. Shall we?"

The kitten on its small, uncertain legs followed her into one of the only two rooms. The fat tenant of the hovel had left some lightwood and kindling, and pots and pans necessary for such an existence as he led on earth.

The Messenger twisted up her hair and

pinned it; then culinary rites began, the kitten breaking into a thin purring when an odor of bacon filled the air.

"Poor little thing!" murmured the Messenger, going to the door for a brief cautionary survey. And, coming back, she lifted the fry pan and helped the kitten first.

They were still eating when the sun set and the sudden Southern darkness fell over woods and fields and river. A splinter of lightwood flared aromatically in an old tin candlestick; by its smoky, wavering radiance she heated some well water, cleaned the tin plates, scoured pan and kettle, and set them in their humble places again.

Then, cleansing her hands daintily, she dried them, and picked up her sewing.

For her, night was the danger time; she could not avoid, by flight across the river, the approach of any enemy from the south; and for an enemy to discover her sitting there in darkness, with lightwood in the house, was to invite suspicion. Yet her only hope, if surprised, was to play her part as keeper of Red Ferry.

So she sat mending, sensitive ears on the alert, breathing quietly in the refreshing cool-

ness that at last had come after so many nights of dreadful heat.

The kitten, too, enjoyed it, patting with tentative velvet paw the skein of silk dangling near the floor.

But it was a very little kitten, and a very lonely one, and presently it asked, plaintively, to be taken up. So the Messenger lifted the mite of fluffy fur and installed it among the linen on the table, where it went to sleep purring.

Outside the open door the dew drummed loudly; moths came in clouds, hovering like snowflakes about the doorway; somewhere in the woods a tiger owl yelped.

About midnight, lying on her sack of husks, close to the borderland of sleep, far away in the darkness she heard a shot.

In one bound she was at the door, buttoning her waist, and listening. And still listening, she lighted a pine splinter, raised her cotton skirt, and adjusted the revolver, strapping the holster tighter above and below her right knee.

The pulsing seconds passed; far above the northern river bank a light sparkled through the haze, then swung aloft; and she drew pa-

per and pencil from her pocket, and wrote down what the torch was saying:

"Shot fired at Muddy Ford. Look out along the river."

And even as the red spark went out in the darkness a lonely birdcall floated across the river—the strange squealing plaint of the great cock-o'-the-pines. She answered, imitating it perfectly. Then a far voice called:

"Hallo-o-o! How's fishin'?"

She picked up her pine candle, hurried out to the bank and crept cautiously down the crazy, wooden stairs. Setting her torch in the iron cage at the bow, she cast off the painter and, standing erect, swung the long pole. Out into obscurity shot the punt, deeper and deeper plunged the pole. She headed up river to allow for the current; the cool breeze blew her hair and bathed her bared throat and arms deliciously; crimson torchlight flickered criss-cross on the smooth water ahead.

Every muscle in her body was in play now; the heavy pole slanted, rose and plunged; the water came clip! slap! clap! slap! against the square bows, dusting her with spray.

On, on, tossing and pitching as the boat hit the swift, deep, center current; then the pole

struck shallower depths, and after a while her torch reddened foliage hanging over the northern river bank.

She drove her pole into the clay as the punt's bow grated; a Federal cavalryman—a mere lad—muddy to the knees, brier-torn, and ghastly pale, waded out through the shallows, revolver in hand, clambered aboard, and struck the torch into the water.

"Take me over," he gasped. "Hurry, for God's sake! I tell you——"

"Was it you who called?"

"Yes. Snuyder sent you, didn't he? Don't stand there talking——"

With a nervous stroke she drove the punt far out into the darkness, then fell into a measured, swinging motion, standing nearer the stern than the bow. There was no sound now but the lapping of water and the man's thick breathing; she strove to pierce the darkness between them, but she could see only a lumpish shadow in the bow where he crouched.

"I reckon you're Roy Allen," she began, but he cut her short:

"Damn it! What's that to you?"

"Nothing. Only Snuyder's gone."

"When?"

"Some days ago, leaving me to ferry folk over. . . . He told me how to answer you when you called like a cock-o'-the-pines."

"Did he?" The voice was subdued and sullen.

For a while he remained motionless, then, in the dull light of the fog-shrouded stars she saw him face her, and caught the faint sparkle of his weapon resting on his knees, covering her.

"It seems to me," he said fiercely, "that you are asking a good many questions. Which side pays you?"

They were tossing now on the rapid little waves in the center of the river; she had all she could do to keep the punt steady and drive it toward the spot where, against the stars, the oaks lifted their clustered crests.

At the foot of the wooden stairs she tied her boat, and offered to relight the pine knot, but he would not have it and made her grope up the ascent before him.

Over the top of the bank she led him, under the trees, to her door, he close at her heels, revolver in hand. And there, on the sill, she faced him.

"What do you want here?" she asked; "supper?"

"Go into the house and strike a light," he said, and followed her in. And, as she turned from the blazing splinter, he caught her by the arm, feeling roughly for a concealed weapon. Face aflame, she struggled out of his clutch; and he was as red as she as they confronted one another, breathing heavily.

"I'm sorry," he stammered. "I'm—h-half-crazed, I think. . . . If you're what you look, God knows I meant you no insult. . . . But—but—their damned spies are everywhere. I've stood too much—I've been in hell for two weeks——"

He wiped his mouth with a trembling, raw hand, but his sunken eyes still glared and the pallor once more blanched his sunken face.

"I'll not touch you again," he said hoarsely; "I'm not a beast—not *that* kind. But I'm starving. Is there anything—*anything*, I tell you? I—I am not—very—strong."

She looked calmly into the ravaged, but still boyish features; saw him swing, reeling a little, on his heels as he steadied himself with one hand against the table.

"Sit down," she said in a low voice.

He sank into a chair, resting the hand which clutched the revolver on the table.

Without a word she went about the business of the moment, rekindled the ashes, filled the fry pan with mush and bacon. A little while afterwards she set the smoking food before him, and seated herself at the opposite side of the table.

The boy ate wolfishly with one hand; the other seemed to have grown fast to the butt of his heavy weapon. She could have bent and shot him under the table had she wished; she could have taken him with her bare hands.

But she only sat there, dark, sorrowful eyes on him, and in pity for his certain doom her under lip trembled at intervals so she could scarcely control it.

"Is there a horse to be had anywhere near here?" he asked, pausing to swallow what his sunken jaws had been working on.

"No; the soldiers have taken everything."

"I will pay—anything if you'll let me have something to ride."

She shook her head.

He went on eating; a slight color had come back into his face.

"I'm sorry I was rough with you," he said, not looking at her.

"Why were you?"

He raised his head wearily.

"I've been hunted so long that I guess it's turned my brain. Except for what you've been good enough to give me, I've had nothing inside me for days, except green leaves and bark and muddy water. . . . I suppose I can't see straight. . . . There's a woman they call the Special Messenger;—I thought they might have started her after me. . . . That shot at the ford seemed to craze me. . . . So I risked the ferry—seeing your light across—and not knowing whether Snuyder was still here or whether they had set a guard to catch me. . . . It was Red Ferry or starve; I'm too weak to swim; I waited too long."

And as the food and hot tea warmed him, his vitality returned in a maddened desire for speech after the weeks of terror and silence.

"I don't know who you are," he went on, "but I guess you're not fixed for shooting at me, as every living thing seems to have done for the last fortnight. Maybe you're in Yankee pay, maybe in Confederate: I can't help it. I suppose you'll tell I've been here after

I'm gone. . . . But they'll never get me now!" he bragged, like a truant schoolboy recounting his misdemeanor to an awed companion.

"Who are you?" she asked very gently.

He looked at her defiantly.

"I'm Roy Allen," he said, "of Kay's Cavalry. . . . If you're fixing to tell the Union people you might as well tell them who [illegible] 'em!"

"What have you done?"

She inquired so innocently that a hint of shame for his suspicion and brutality toward her reddened his hollow cheeks.

"I'll tell you what I've done," he said. "I've taken to the woods, headed for Dixie, with a shirtful of headquarter papers. That's what I've done. . . . And perhaps you don't know what that means if they catch me. It means hanging."

"Hanging!" she faltered.

"Yes—if they get me." His voice quivered, but he added boastingly: "No fear of that! I'm too many for old Kay!"

"But—but why did you desert?"

"Why?" he repeated. Then his face turned red and he burst out violently: "I'll

tell you why. I lived in New York, but I thought the South was in the right. Then they drafted me; and I tried to tell them it was an outrage, but they gave me the choice between Fort Lafayette and Kay's Cavalry. . . . And I took the Cavalry and waited. . . . I wouldn't have gone as far as to fight against the flag—if they had let me alone. . . . I only had my private opinion that the South was more in the right than we—the North—was. . . . I'm old enough to have an opinion about niggers, and I'm no coward either. . . . They drove me to this; I didn't want to kill people who were more in the right than we were. . . . But they made me enlist—and I couldn't stand it. . . . And now, if I've got to fight, I'll fight bullies and brutes who——"

He ended with a gesture—an angry, foolish boast, shaking his weapon toward the north. Then, hot, panting, sullenly sensible of his fatigue, he laid the pistol on the table and glowered at the floor.

She could have taken him, unarmed, at any moment, now.

"Soldier," she said gently, "listen to me."

He looked up with heavy-lidded eyes.

"I am trying to help you to safety," she said.

A hot flush of mortification mantled his face:

"Thank you. . . . I ought to have known; I—I am ashamed of what I said—what I did."

"You were only a little frightened; I am not angry."

"You understand, don't you?"

"A—little."

"You are Southern, then?" he said; and in spite of himself his heavy lids began to droop again.

"No; Northern," she replied.

His eyes flew wide open at that, and he straightened up in his chair.

"Are you afraid of me, Soldier?"

"No," he said, ashamed again. "But—you're going to tell on me after I am gone."

"No."

"Why not?" he demanded suspiciously.

She leaned both elbows on the table, and resting her chin on both palms, smiled at him.

"Because," she said, "you are going to tell on yourself, Roy."

"What!" he blurted out in angry astonishment.

"You are going to tell on yourself. . . . You are going back to your regiment. . . . It will be your own idea, too; it *has* been your own idea all the while—your secret desire every moment since you deserted——"

"Are you crazy!" he cried, aghast; "or do you think I am?"

"—ever since you deserted," she went on, dark eyes looking deep into his, "it has been your desire to go back. . . . Fear held you; rage hardened your heart; dread of death as your punishment; angry brooding on what you believed was a terrible injustice done you—all these drove you to panic. . . . Don't scowl at me: don't say what is on your lips to say. You are only a tired, frightened boy—scarcely eighteen, are you? And at eighteen no heart can really be a traitor."

"Traitor!" he repeated, losing all his angry color.

"It is a bad word, isn't it, Roy? Lying hidden and starving in the forest through the black nights you had to fight that word away from you—drive it out of your half-crazed senses—often—didn't you? Don't you think

I know, my boy, what a dreadful future you faced, lying there through the stifling nights while they hunted you to hang you?

"I know, also, that what you did you did in a moment of insane rage. I know that the moment it was done you would, in your secret soul, have given the world to have undone it."

"No!" he cried. "I was right!"

She rose, walked to the door, and seated herself on the sill, looking up at the stars.

For an hour she sat there, silent. Behind her, leaning heavily on the table, he crouched, hot eyes wide, pulse heavy in throat and body. And at last, without turning, she called to him—three times, very gently, speaking his name; and at the third call he rose and came stumbling toward her.

"Sit here."

He sank down beside her on the sill.

"Are you very tired?"

"Yes."

She placed one arm around him, drawing his hot head down on her shoulder.

"How foolish you have been," she whispered. "But, of course, your mother must not know it. . . . There is no reason to tell her—ever. . . . Because you went quite mad

for a little while—and nobody is blamed for mental sickness. . . . How bright the stars are. . . . What a heavenly coolness after that dreadful work. . . . How feverish you are! I think that your regiment believes you roamed away while suffering from sunstroke. . . . Their Colonel is a good friend of mine. Tell him you're sorry."

His head lay heavily on her shoulder; she laid a fresh hand over his eyes.

"If the South is right, if we of the North are right, God knows better than you or I, Roy. . . . And if you are so bewildered that you have no deep conviction either way I think you may trust Him who set you among Kay's Cavalry. . . . God never betrayed a human soul in honest doubt."

"It—it was the flag!—that was the hardest to get over—" he began, and choked, smothering the dry sob against her breast.

"I know, dear. . . . The old flag means so much—it means all that our fathers have been, all that we ought to be for the world's sake. Anger, private resentment, bitterness under tyranny—these are little things; for, after all, the flag still stands for what we ought to be—you and I and those who misuse us, wittingly

or otherwise. . . . Where are the papers you took?"

He pressed his feverish face closer to her shoulder and fumbled at the buttons of his jacket.

"Here?" she asked softly, aiding him with deft fingers; and in a moment she had secured them.

For a while she held him there, cradling him; and his dry, burning face seemed to scorch her shoulder.

Dawn was in the sky when she unclosed her eyes—a cool, gray dawn, hinting of rain.

She looked down at the boy. His head lay across her lap; he slept, motionless as the dead.

The sun rose, a pale spot on the gray horizon.

"Come," she said gently. And again, "Come; I want you to take me across the ferry."

He rose and stood swaying on his feet, rubbing both eyes with briar-torn fists.

"You will take me, won't you, Roy?"

"Where?"

"Back to your regiment."

"Yes—I'll take you."

For a few moments she was busy gathering up her spools and linen.

"You carry my saddlebags," she said, "and I'll take the kitten. Isn't it cunning, Roy? Do look at the poor little thing! We can't leave it here."

Following, laden with her saddlebags, he stammered:

"Do—d-do you think they'll shoot me?"

"No," she said, smiling. "Be careful of the ferry steps; they are dreadfully shaky."

She began the descent, clasping the kitten in both arms; the boy followed. Seated in the punt, they stowed away the saddlebags and the kitten, then he picked up the pole, looked at her, hesitated. She waited.

"I guess the old man will have me shot. . . . But—I am going back," he said, as though to himself.

She watched him; he looked up.

"You're right, ma'am. I must have been crazy. Everybody reads about traitors—in school. . . . Nobody ever forgets their names. . . . I don't want my name in school books."

"Like Benedict Arnold's," she said; and he quivered from head to foot.

"Oh, cricky!" he burst out, horrified; "how close I came to it! Have you got those papers safe?"

"Yes, Roy."

"Then I'll go. I don't care what they do to me."

As he rose with the pole, far away in the woods across the river a cavalry band began to play. Faint and clear the strains of the Star-Spangled Banner rose from among the trees and floated over the water; the boy stood spellbound, mouth open; then, as the far music died away, he sank back into the boat, deathly pale.

"I—I ought to be hung!" he whispered.

The Messenger picked up the fallen pole, set it, and drove the punt out into the river. Behind her, huddled in the stern, the prodigal wept, uncomforted, head buried in his shaking arms; and the kitten, being afraid, left the shelter of the thwarts and crept up on his knees, sitting there and looking out at the unstable world of water in round-eyed apprehension.

As the punt grated on the northern shore the Messenger drove her pole into the mud, upright, and leaned on it.

"Roy," she said, looking back over her shoulder.

The boy rubbed his wet eyes with the sleeve of his jacket and got up.

"Are you afraid?"

"Not now."

"That is well. . . . You'll be punished. . . . Not severely. . . . For you came back of your own accord—repentant. . . . Tell me, were you really afraid that the Special Messenger might catch you?"

"Yes, I was," he said simply. "That's why I acted so rough with you. . . . I didn't know; they say any woman you see may be the Special Messenger. . . . So I took no chances. . . . Who are you, anyway?"

"Only a friend of yours," she said, smiling. "Please pick up my kitten. Thank you. . . . And some day, when you've been very, very good, I'll ask Colonel Kay to let you take me fishing."

And she stepped lightly ashore; the boy followed, holding the kitten under one arm and drying his grimy eyes on his sleeve.

VI

AN AIR-LINE

"AS for me," continued Colonel Gay bitterly, "I'm driven almost frantic by this conspiracy. Whenever a regiment arrives or leaves, whenever a train stirs—yes, by Heaven, every time a locomotive toots or a mule brays or a chicken has the pip—*somebody* informs the Johnnies, and every detail is known to them within a few hours!"

The Special Messenger seated herself on the edge of the camp table. "I suppose they

are very disagreeable to you about it at headquarters."

"Yes, they are—but how can I help it? Somehow or other, whatever is done or said or even thought in this devilish supply camp is immediately reported to Jeb Stuart; every movement of trains and troops leaks out; he'll know to-night what I ate for breakfast this morning—I'll bet on that. And, Messenger, let me tell you something. Joking aside, this thing is worrying me sick. Can you help me?"

"I'll try," she said. "Headquarters sent me. They're very anxious up there about the railroad."

"I can't help it!" cried the distracted officer. "On Thursday I had to concentrate the line-patrol to drive Maxon's bushwhackers out of Laurel Siding; and look what Stuart did to me. No sooner were we off than he struck the unguarded section and tore up two miles of track! What am I to do?"

The Special Messenger shook her pretty head in sympathy.

"There's a leak somewhere," insisted the angry officer; "it smells to Heaven, but I can't locate it. Somewhere there's a direct, in-

telligent and sinister underground communication between Osage Court House and Jeb Stuart at Sandy River—or wherever he is. And what I want you to do is to locate that leak and plug it."

"Of course," murmured the Special Messenger, gently tapping her riding skirt with her whip.

"Because," continued the Colonel, "headquarters is stripping this depot of troops. The Bucktails go to-day; Casson's New York brigade and Darrel's cavalry left yesterday. What remains is a mighty small garrison for a big supply depot—eleven hundred effectives, and they may take some of them at any moment. You see the danger?"

"Yes, I do."

"I've protested; I've pointed out the risk we run; I sent my third messenger to headquarters this afternoon. Of course, they don't intend to leave this depot unguarded—probably they'll send the Vermont troops from the North this week—but between the departure of Casson's column and the theoretical arrival of reënforcements from Preston, we'd be in a bad way if Stuart should raid us in force. And with this irritating and constant leaking

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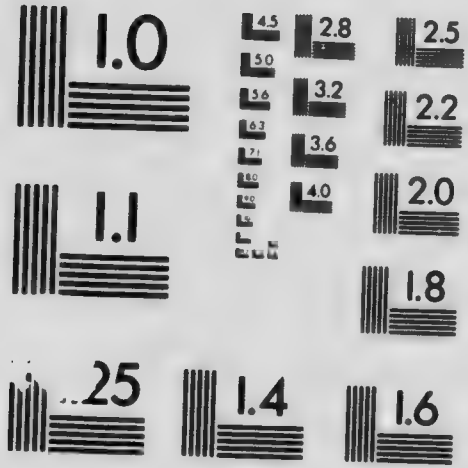

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out of information I'm horribly afraid he'll strike us as soon as the Bucktails entrain."

"Why don't you hold the Pennsylvania infantry until we can find out where the trouble lies?" asked the girl, raising her dark eyes to the nervous young Colonel.

"I haven't the authority; I've asked for it twice. Orders stand; the Bucktails are going, and I'm worried to death." He shoved his empty pipe into his mouth and bit viciously at the stem.

"Then," she said, "if I'm to do anything I'd better hurry, hadn't I?"

The young officer's face grew grimmer. "Certainly; but I've been a month at it and I'm no wiser. Of course I know you are very celebrated, ma'am; but, really, *do* you think it likely that you can pick out this hidden mischief-maker before he sends word to Stuart to-night of our deplorable condition?"

"How long have I?"

"About a day."

"When do the Bucktails go?"

"At nine to-night."

"Who knows it?"

"Who doesn't? I can't move a regiment and its baggage in a day, can I? I've given

them twenty-four hours to break camp and entrain."

"Does the train master know which troops are going?"

"He has orders to hold three trains, steam up, night and day."

"I see," she murmured, strapping her soft riding hat more securely to her hair with the elastic band. Her eyes had been wandering restlessly around the tent as though searching for something which she could not find.

"Have you a good map of the district?" she asked.

He went to his military chest, opened it, and produced a map. For a while, both hands on the table, she leaned above the map studying the environment.

"And Stuart? You say he's roaming around somewhere in touch with Sandy River?" she asked, pointing with a pencil to that metropolis on the map.

"The Lord knows where *he* is!" muttered the Colonel. "He may be a hundred miles south now, and in my back yard to-morrow by breakfast time. But when he's watching us he's usually near Sandy River."

"I see. And these"—drawing her pencil

in a wavering line—"are your outposts? I mean those pickets nearest Sandy River."

"They are. Those are rifle pits."

"A grand guard patrols this line?" she asked, rising to her feet.

"Yes; a company of cavalry and a field gun."

"Do you issue passes?"

"Not to the inhabitants."

"Have any people — civilians — asked for passes?"

"I had two applications; one from a Miss Carryl, who lives about a mile beyond here on the Sandy River Road; another from an old farmer, John Deal, who has a fruit and truck farm half a mile outside our lines. He wanted to come in with his produce and I let him for a while. But that leakage worried me, so I stopped him."

"And this Miss Carryl—did she want to go out?"

"She owns the Deal farm. Yes, she wanted to drive over every day; and I let her until, as I say, I felt obliged to stop the whole business—not permit anybody to go out or come in except our own troops."

"And still the leakage continues?"

"It certainly does," he said dryly.

The Special Messenger seated herself on one end of the military chest and gazed absently at space. Her booted foot swung gently at intervals.

"So this Miss Carryl owns John Deal's farm," she mused aloud.

"They run it on shares, I believe."

"Oh! Was she angry when you shut out her tenant, John Deal, and shut her inside the lines?"

"No; she seemed a little surprised—said it was inconvenient—wanted permission to write him."

"You gave it?"

"Yes. I intimated it would save time if she left her letters to him unsealed. She seemed quite willing."

"You read them all, of course, before delivering them?"

"Of course. There was nothing in them except instructions about plowing, fruit picking, and packing, and various bucolic matters."

"Oh! Nothing to be read between the lines? No cipher? No invisible ink? No tricks of any sort?"

"Not one. I had a detective here. He said there was absolutely no harm in the letters, in Miss Carryl, or in John Deal. I have all the letters if you care to look at them; I always keep the originals and allow only copies to be sent to old man Deal."

"Let me see those letters," suggested the Messenger.

The Colonel, who had been sitting on the camp table, got off wearily, rummaged in a dispatch box, and produced three letters, all unsealed.

Two were directed in a delicately flowing, feminine hand to John Deal, Waycross Orchard. The Messenger unfolded the first and read:

Dear Mr. Deal:

Colonel Gay has thought it necessary, for military reasons, to revoke my pass; and I shall, therefore, be obliged hereafter to communicate with you by letter only.

I wish, if there are negroes enough remaining in the quarters, that you would start immediately a seedling orchard of white Rare-ripe peaches from my orchard here. I have permission to send the pits to you by the military post-rider who passes my house. I will send you twenty every day as my peaches ripen. Please

prepare for planting. I hope your rheumatism is better.

Yours very truly,

EVELYN CARRYL.

The Messenger's dark eyes lifted dreamily to the Colonel:

"You gave her permission to send the pits by your post-rider?"

"Yes," he said, smiling; "but I always look over them myself. You know the wedding gown of the fairy princess was hidden in a grape seed."

"You are *quite* sure about the pits?"

"Perfectly."

"Oh! When does the next batch of twenty go?"

"In about an hour. Miss Carryl puts them in a bag and gives them to my messenger who brings them to me. Then I inspect every pit, tie up the bag, seal it, and give it to my messenger. When he takes the mail to the outposts he rides on for half a mile and leaves the sealed bag at Deal's farm."

"Does your messenger know what is in the bag?"

"No, he doesn't."

She nodded, amused, saying carelessly:

"Of course you trust your post-rider?"

"Absolutely."

The Special Messenger swung her foot absently to and fro, and presently opened another letter:

Dear Mr. Deal:

I am sending you twenty more peach pits for planting. What you write me about the bees is satisfactory. I have received the bees you sent. There is no reason why you should not make the exchange with Mr. Enderly, as it will benefit our hives as well as Mr. Enderly's to cross his Golden Indias with my Blacks.

The Messenger studied the letter thoughtfully; askance, the officer watched the delicate play of expression on her absorbed young face, perhaps a trifle incredulous that so distractingly pretty a woman could be quite as intelligent as people believed.

She looked up at him quietly.

"So you gave Deal permission to send some bees to Miss Carryl and write her a letter?"

"Once. I had the letter brought to me and I sent her a copy. Here it is—the original."

He produced Deal's letter from the dispatch pouch, and the Messenger read:

Miss Evelyn Carryl,
Osage Court House.

Respected Miss:

I send you the bees. I seen Mr. Enderly at Sandy River he says he is very wishful for to swap bees to cross the breed I says it shorely can be done if you say so I got the pits and am studyin' how to plant. The fruit is a rottin' can't the Yankees at Osage buy some truck nohow off'n me? So no more with respect from

JOHN DEAL,
Supt.

"That seems rather harmless, doesn't it?" asked the Colonel wearily.

"I don't—know. I *think* I'll take a look at John Deal's beehives."

"His *beehives*!"

"Yes."

"What for?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know—exactly. I was always fond of bees. They're so useful"—she looked up artlessly—"so clever—quite wonderful, Colonel. Have you ever read anything about bees—how they live and conduct themselves?"

The Colonel eyed her narrowly; she

laughed, sprang up from the military chest, and handed back his letters.

"You have already formed your theory?" he inquired with a faintly patronizing air, under which keen disappointment betrayed itself where the grim, drooping mouth tightened.

"Yes, I have. There's a link missing, but —I may find that before night. You can give me—*how* long?"

"The Bucktails leave at nine. See here, Messenger! With all the civility and respect due you, I——"

"You are bitterly disappointed in me," she finished coolly. "I don't blame you, Colonel Gay."

He was abashed at that, but unconvinced.

"Why do you suspect this Miss Carryl and this man, Deal, when I've showed you how impossible it is that they could send out information?"

"Somehow," she said quietly, "they *do* send it—if they are the only two people who have had passes, and who now are permitted to correspond."

"But you saw the letters——"

"So did you, Colonel."

"I did!" he said emphatically; "and

there's nothing dangerous in them. As for the peach pits——"

"Oh, I'll take your word for them, too," she said, laughing. "When is your post-rider due?"

"In a few minutes, now."

She began to pace backward and forward, the smile still lightly etched on her lips. The officer watched her; puckers of disappointed anxiety creased his forehead; he bit at his pipestem, and thought of the Bucktails. Certainly Stuart would hear of their going; surely before the northern reënforcements arrived the gray riders would come thundering into Osage Court House. Fire, pillage, countless stores wasted, trains destroyed, miles of railroads rendered useless. What, in Heaven's name, could his superiors be thinking of, to run such risk with one of the bases of supplies? Somewhere—*somewhere*, not far from corps headquarters, sat incompetency enthroned—gross negligence—under a pair of starred shoulder straps. And, musing bitterly, he thought he knew to whom those shoulder straps belonged.

"The damn fool!" he muttered, biting at his pipe.

"Colonel," said the Messenger cheerily, "I am going to take the mail to the outposts today."

"As you like," he said, without interest.

"I want, also, a pass for Miss Carryl."

"To pass our lines?"

"To pass *out*. She will not care to return."

"Certainly," he said with amiable curiosity. He scratched off the order and she took it.

"Ask for anything you desire," he said, smiling.

"Then may I have this tent to myself for a little while? And would you be kind enough to send for my saddlebags and my own horse."

The Colonel went to the tent flap, spoke to the trooper on guard. When he came back he said that it was beginning to rain.

"Hard?" she asked, troubled.

"No; just a fine, warm drizzle. It won't last."

"All the better!" she cried, brightening; and it seemed to the young officer as though the sun had gleamed for an instant on the tent wall. But it was only the radiant charm of her, transfiguring, with its youthful brilliancy, the dull light in the tent; and, presently, the

Colonel went away, leaving her very busy with her saddlebags.

There was a cavalry trooper's uniform in one bag; she undressed hurriedly and put it on. Over this she threw a long, blue army cloak, turned up the collar, and, twisting her hair tightly around her head, pulled over it the gray, slouch campaign hat, with its crossed sabres of gilt and its yellow braid.

It was a boyish-looking rider who mounted at the Colonel's tent and went cantering away through the warm, misty rain, mail pouch and sabre flopping.

There was no need for her to inquire the way. She knew Waycross, the Carryl home, and John Deal's farm as well as she knew her own home in Sandy River.

The drizzle had laid the dust and washed clean the roadside grass and bushes; birds called expectantly from fence and thorny thicket, as the sun whitened through the mist above; butterflies, clinging to dewy sprays, opened their brilliant wings in anticipation; swallows and martins were already soaring upward again; a clean, sweet, fragrant vapor rose from earth and shrub.

Ahead of her, back from the road, at the

end of its private avenue of splendid oaks, an old house glimmered through the trees; and the Special Messenger's eyes were fixed on it steadily as she rode.

Pillar, portico, and porch glistened white amid the leaves; Cherokee roses covered the gallery lattice; an old negro was pretending to mow the unkempt lawn with a sickle, but whenever the wet grass stuck to the blade he sat down to examine the landscape and shake his aged head at the futility of all things mundane. The clatter of the Special Messenger's horse aroused him; at the same instant a graceful woman, dressed in black, came to the edge of the porch and stood there as though waiting.

The big gateway was open; under arched branches the Messenger galloped down the long drive and drew bridle, touching the brim of her slouch hat. And the Southern woman looked into the Messenger's eyes without recognition.

Miss Carryl was fair, yellow-haired and blue-eyed—blonder for the dull contrast of the mourning she wore—and her voice was as colorless as her skin when she bade the trooper good afternoon.

All she could see of this cloaked cavalryman was two dark, youthful eyes above the upturned collar of the cloak, shadowed, too, by the wet hat brim, drooping under gilded crossed sabres.

"You are not the usual mail-carrier?" she asked languidly.

"No, ma'am"—in a nasal voice.

"Colonel Gay sent you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Miss Carryl turned, lifted a small salt sack, and offered it to the Messenger, who leaned wide from her saddle and took it in one hand.

"You are to take this bag to the Deal farm. Colonel Gay has told you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Thank you. And there is no letter to-day. Will you have a few peaches to eat on the way? I always give the mail-carrier some of my peaches to eat."

Miss Carryl lifted a big, blue china bowl full of superb, white, rare-ripe peaches, and, coming to the veranda's edge, motioned the Messenger to open the saddlebags. Into it she poured a number of peaches.

"They are perfectly ripe," she said; "I hope you will like them."

"Thank'y, ma'am."

"And, Soldier," she turned to add with careless grace, "if you would be kind enough to drop the pits back into the saddlebag and give them to Mr. Deal he would be glad of them for planting."

"Yes'm; I will——"

"How many peaches did I give you? Have you enough?"

"Plenty, ma'am; you gave me seven, ma'am."

"Seven? Take two more—I insist—that makes nine, I think. Good day; and thank you."

But the Messenger did not hear; there was something far more interesting to occupy her mind—a row of straw-thatched beehives under the fruit trees at the eastern end of the house.

From moment to moment, homing or outgoing bees sped like bullets across her line of vision; the hives were busy now that a gleam of pale sunshine lay across the grass. One bee, leaving the hive, came humming around the Cherokee roses. The Messenger saw the little insect alight and begin to scramble about, plundering the pollen-powdered blossom. The bee was a yellow one.

Suddenly the Messenger gathered bridle and touched her hat; and away she spurred, putting her horse to a dead run.

Passing the inner lines, she halted to give and receive the password, then tossed a bunch of letters to the corporal, and spurred forward. Halted by the outer pickets, she exchanged amenities again, rid herself of the remainder of the mail, and rode forward, loosening the revolver in her holster. Then she ate her first peach.

It was delicious—a delicate, dripping, snow-white pulp, stained with pink where the pit rested. There was nothing suspicious about that pit, or any of the others when she broke the fragrant fruit in halves and carefully investigated. Then she tore off the seal and opened the bag and examined each of the twenty dry pits within. Not one had been tampered with.

Her horse had been walking along the moist, fragrant road; a few moments later she passed the last cavalry picket, and at the same moment she caught sight of John Deal's farm.

The house was neat and white and small; orchards stretched in every direction; a few

beehives stood under the fruit trees near a well.

A big, good-humored looking man came out into the path as the Messenger drew bridle, greeted the horse with a caress and its rider with a pleasant salute.

"I'm very much obliged to you," he said, taking the sack of pits. "I reckon we're bound to have more fine weather. What's this —some peach pits from Miss Carryl?"

"Nine," nodded the Messenger.

"Nine! I'll have nine fine young trees this time three years, I reckon. Thank you, suh. How's things over to the Co't House?"

"Troops arriving all the while," said the Messenger carelessly.

"Comin' *in*?"

"Lots."

"Sho! I heard they was sendin' 'em East."

"Oh, some. We've got to have elbow-room. Can't pack two army corps into Osage Court House."

"Two a'my co'ps, suh?"

"More or less."

John Deal balanced the sack in the palm of one work-worn hand and looked hard at the Messenger. He could see only her eyes.

"'Turn around,' said the Special Messenger."

"Reckon you ain't the same trooper as come yesterday."

"No."

"What might be yoh regiment?"

The Messenger was looking hard at the bee-hives. The door of one of the hives, a new one, was shut.

"What regiment did you say, suh?" repeated Deal, showing his teeth in a friendly grin; and suddenly froze rigid as he found himself inspecting the round, smoky muzzle of a six-shooter.

"Turn around," said the Special Messenger. Her voice was even and passionless.

John Deal turned.

"Cross your hands behind your back. Quickly, please! Now back up to this horse. Closer!"

There was a glimmer, a click; and the man stood handcuffed.

"Sit down on the grass with your back against that tree. Make yourself comfortable."

Deal squatted awkwardly, settled, and turned a pallid face to the Messenger.

"What'n hell's this mean?" he demanded.

"Don't move and don't shout," said the

Messenger. "If you do I'll have to gag you. I'm only going over there to take a look at your bees."

The pallor on the man's face was dreadful, but he continued to stare at the Messenger coolly enough.

"It's a damned outrage!" he began thickly. "I had a pass from your Colonel——"

"If you don't keep quiet I'll have to tie up your face," observed the Messenger, dismounting and flinging aside her cloak.

Then, as she walked toward the little row of beehives, carrying only her riding whip, the farmer's eyes grew round and a dull flush empurpled his face and neck.

"By God!" he gasped; "it's *her*!" and said not another word.

She advanced cautiously toward the hives; very carefully, with the butt of her whip, she closed the sliding door over every exit, then seated herself in the grass within arm's length of the hives and, crossing her spurred boots, leaned forward, expectant, motionless.

A bee arrived, plunder-laden, dropped on the sill and began to walk toward the closed entrance of his hive. Finding it blocked, the insect buzzed angrily. Another bee whizzed

by her and lit on the sill of another hive; another came, another, and another.

Very gingerly, as each insect alighted, she raised the sliding door and let it enter. Deal watched her, fascinated.

An hour passed; she had admitted hundreds of bees, always closing the door behind each new arrival. Then something darted through the range of her vision and alighted, buzzing awkwardly on the sill of a hive—an ordinary, yellow-brown honey bee, yet differing from the others in that its thighs seemed to be snow-white.

Quick as a flash the Messenger leaned forward and caught the insect in her gloved fingers, holding it by the wings flat over the back.

Its abdomen dilated and twisted, and the tiny sting was thrust out, vainly searching the enemy; but the Messenger, drawing a pin from her jacket, deftly released the two white encumbrances from the insect's thighs—two thin cylinders of finest tissue paper, and flung the angry insect high into the air. It circled, returned to the hive, and she let it in.

There was a groan from the manacled man under the trees; she gave him a rapid glance,

shook her head in warning, and, leaning forward, deftly lifted a second white-thighed bee from the hive over which it was scrambling in a bewildered sort of way.

A third, fourth, and fifth bee arrived in quick succession; she robbed them all of their tissue-paper cylinders. Then for a while no more arrived, and she wondered whether her guess had been correct, that the nine peaches and wet pits meant to John Deal that nine bees were to be expected — eager home-comers, which he had sent to his mistress and which, as she required their services, she released, certain that they would find their old hives on John Deal's farm and carry to him the messages she sent.

And they came at last—the sixth, seventh —then after a long interval the eighth—and, finally, the ninth bee whizzed up to the hive and fell, scrambling, its movements embarrassed by the tiny, tissue cylinders.

The Messenger waited another hour; there were no more messengers among the bees that arrived.

Then she opened every hive door, rose, walked over to the closed hive that stood apart and opened the door of that.

A *black* honeybee crawled out, rose into the air, and started due south; another followed, then three, then a dozen; and then the hive vomited a swarm of *black* bees which sped southward.

Sandy River lay due south; also, the home-hive from which they had been taken and confined as prisoners; also, a certain famous officer lingered at Sandy River—one, General J. E. B. Stuart, very much interested in the bee-hives belonging to a friend of his, a Mr. Enderly.

When she had relieved each messenger-bee of its tissue-paper dispatch, she had taken the precaution to number each tiny cylinder, in order of its arrival, from one to nine. Now she counted them, looked over each message, laid them carefully away between the leaves of a pocket notebook, slipped it into the breast of her jacket, and, rising, walked over to John Deal.

"Here is the key to those handcuffs," she said, hanging it around his neck by the bit of cord on which it was dangling. "Somebody at Sandy River will unlock them for you. But it would be better, Mr. Deal, if you remained outside our lines until this war is ended. I

don't blame you—I'm sorry for you—and for your mistress."

She set toe to stirrup, mounted easily, fastened her cloak around her.

"I'm really sorry," she said. "I hope nobody will injure your pretty farm. Good-by."

Miss Carryl was standing at the end of the beautiful, oak-shaded avenue when the Messenger, arriving at full speed, drew bridle and whirled her horse.

Looking straight into the pretty Southern woman's eyes, she said gravely:

"Miss Carryl, your bees have double stings. I am very sorry for you—very, very sorry. I hope your property will be respected while you are at Sandy River."

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Carryl. Over her pale features a painful tremor played.

"You know what I mean. And I am afraid you had better go at once. John Deal is already on his way."

There was a long silence. Miss Carryl found her voice at length.

"Thank you," she said without a tremor. "Will I have any trouble in passing the Yankee lines?"

"Here is your passport. I had prepared it."

As the Messenger bent over from the saddle to deliver the pass, somehow her hat, with its crossed gilt sabres, fell off. She caught it in one hand; a bright blush mantled throat and face.

The Southern woman looked up at the girl in the saddle, so dramatically revealed for what she was under the superb accusation of her hair.

"*You?*"

"Yes—God help us both!"

The silence was terrible.

"It scarcely surprises me," murmured Miss Carryl with a steady smile. "I saw only your eyes before, but they seemed too beautiful for a boy's."

Then she bent her delicately-molded head and studied the passport. The Messenger, still blushing, drew her hat firmly over her forehead and fastened a loosened braid. Presently she took up her bridle.

"I will ask Colonel Gay's protection for Waycross House," she said in a low voice. "I am so dreadfully sorry that this has happened."

"You need not be; I have only tried to do

for my people what you are doing for yours—but I should be glad of a guard for Waycross. *His* grave is in the orchard there." And with a quiet inclination of the head she turned away into the oak-bordered avenue, walking slowly toward the house which, in a few moments, she must leave forever.

In the late sunshine her bees flashed by, seeking the fragrant home-hives; long, ruddy bars of sunlight lay across grass and tree trunk; on the lawn the old servant still chopped at the unkempt grass, and the music of his sickle sounded pleasantly under the trees.

On these things the fair-haired Southern woman looked, and if her eye dimmed and her pale lip quivered there was nobody to see. And after a little while she went into the house, slowly, head held high, black skirt lifted, just clearing the threshold of her ancestors.

Then the Special Messenger, head hanging, wheeled her horse and rode slowly back to Osage Court House.

She passed the Colonel, who was dismounting just outside his tent, and saluted him without enthusiasm:

"The leak is stopped, sir. Miss Carryl is

going to Sandy River; John Deal is on his way. They won't come back—and, Colonel, won't you give special orders that her house is not to be disturbed? She is an old school friend."

The Colonel stared at her incredulously.

"I'm afraid you still have your doubts about that leak, sir."

"Yes, I have."

She dismounted wearily; an orderly took her horse, and without a word she and the Colonel entered the tent.

"They used bees for messengers," she said; "that was the leak."

"Bees?"

"Honey bees, Colonel."

For a whole minute he was silent, then burst out:

"Good God! *Bees!* And if such a—an extraordinary performance were possible how did *you* guess it?"

"Oh," she said patiently, "I used them that way when I was a little girl. Bees, like pigeons, go back to their homes. Look, sir! Here, in order, are the dispatches, each traced in cipher on a tiny roll of tissue. They were tied to the bees' thighs."

And she spread them out in order under his amazed eyes; and this is what he saw when she pieced them together for him:

EIO$_2$W$_2$ x I8W$_3$ △ NI$_7$W$_3$ x
OII6I$_5$W$_3$ x ENI$_7$I$_7$I$_4$I8I$_5$O$_2$
N x I$_7$IE x I$_4$O$_2$I$_2$x
N x HI$_5$ x Io$_2$Ex
N x O x E x WNW$_3$x
W x I 8E$_3$XHN ☽ x
L x I$_3$ △ O$_2$XW$_3$I$_5$W$_3$NW$_2$x

I$_4$I$_2$ x I8W$_3$I$_7$I$_4$LI x NW$_3$x
I$_5$O$_2$HL x O$_2$I$_4$EI$_3$W$_3$x
HNI$_7$I$_7$ ⊕ W$_2$

"That's all very well," he said, "but how about this hieroglyphic? Do you think anybody on earth is capable of reading such a thing?"

"Why not?"

"Can *you*?"

"All such ciphers are solved by the same method. . . . Yes, Colonel, I can read it very easily."

"Well, would you mind doing so?"

"Not in the slightest, sir. The key is extremely simple. I will show you." And she picked up pencil and paper and wrote:

One
Two
Three
Four
Five
Six
Seven
Eight
Nine
Ten
Eleven
Twelve
Thirteen
Fourteen
Fifteen
Sixteen
Seventeen
Eighteen
Nineteen
Twenty

"Now," she said, "taking the second letter in each word, we can parallel that column thus:

N equals the letter A
W equals the letter B
H equals the letter C
O equals the letter D
I equals the letter E

"Then, in the word *six* we have the letter *I* again as the second letter, so we call it I2. And, continuing, we have:

I2 equals the letter F
E equals the letter G
I3 equals the letter H
I4 equals the letter I
E2 equals the letter J
L equals the letter K
W2 equals the letter L
H2 equals the letter M
O2 equals the letter N
I5 equals the letter O
I6 equals the letter P
E3 equals the letter Q
I7 equals the letter R
I8 equals the letter S
W3 equals the letter T

"Now, using these letters for the symbols in the cipher:

EIO2W2 x I8W3 △ NI7W3 x
OII6I5W3 x ENI7I7I4I8I5O2
N x I7IE x I4O2I2x
N x HI5 x IO2Ex
N x O x E x WNW3x
W x I 8E3XHN ☽ x
L x I3 △ O2XW3I5W3NW2x

I4I2 x I8W3I7I4LI x NW3x
I5O2HL x O2I4EI3W3x
HNI7I7 ⊕ W2

"We translate it freely thus, and I'll underline only the words in the cipher:

Gen'l Stuart:

(Sandy River?)

(The present) Depot Garrison (of Osage Court House is)

One Reg(iment) (of) Inf(antry)

One Co(mpany of) Eng(ineers)

One Four G(un) Bat(tery)

Two Sq(uadrons) (of) Cav(alry)

Eleven Hun(dred men) Total

If (you) strike (strike) at once (and at) night!

(Signed) Carryl.

"Do you see, Colonel, how very simple it is, after all?"

The Colonel, red and astounded, hung over the paper, laboriously verifying the cipher and checking off each symbol with its alphabetical equivalent.

"What's that mark?" he demanded; "this symbol——"

"It stands for the letter U, sir."

"How do you know?"

The Messenger, seated sideways on the camp table, one small foot swinging, looked down and bit her lip.

"Must I tell you?"

"As you please. And I'll say now that your

solving this intricate and devilish cipher is, to me, a more utterly amazing performance than the rebel use of bees as messengers."

She shook her head slowly.

"It need not amaze you. . . . I was born in Sandy River. . . . And in happier times—when my parents were living—I spent the school vacations there. . . . We had always kept bees. . . . There was—in those days—a boy. We were very young and—romantic. We exchanged vows — and bees — and messages in cipher. . . . I knew this cipher as soon as I saw it. I invented it—long ago—for him and me."

"W-well," stammered the bewildered Colonel, "I don't see how——"

"I do, sir. Our girl and boy romance was a summer dream. One day he dreamed truer. So did the beautiful Miss Carryl. . . . And the pretty game I invented for him he taught in turn to his fiancée. . . . Well, he died in The Valley. . . . And I have just given his fiancée her passport. It would be very kind of you to station a guard at the Carryl place for its protection. Would you mind giving the order, sir? . . . *He* is buried there."

The Colonel, hands clasped behind him, walked to the tent door.

"Yes," he said, "I'll give the order."

A few moments later the drums of the Bucktails began beating the assembly.

VII

THE PASS

HER map, which at headquarters was supposed to be reliable, had grossly misled her; the road bore east instead of north, dwindling, as she advanced, to a rocky path among the foothills. She had taken the wrong turn at the forks; there was nothing to direct her any farther—no landmarks except the general trend of the watercourse, and the dull cinders of sunset fading to ashes in the west.

It was impossible now to turn back; Car-

rick's flying column must be very close on her heels by this time—somewhere yonder in the dusk, paralleling her own course, with only a dark curtain of forest intervening.

So all that evening, and far into the starlit night, she struggled doggedly forward, leading her lamed horse over the mountain, dragging him through laurel thickets, tangles of azalea and rhododendron, thrashing across the swift mountain streams that tumbled out of starry, pine-clad heights, foaming athwart her trail with the rushing sound of forest winds.

For a while the clear radiance of the stars lighted the looming mountains; but when wastes of naked rock gave place to ragged woods, lakes and pits of darkness spread suddenly before her; every gully, every ravine brimmed level with treacherous shadows, masking the sheer fall of rock plunging downward into fathomless depths.

Again and again, as she skirted the unseen edges of destruction, chill winds from unsuspected deeps halted her; she dared not light the lantern, dared not halt, dared not even hesitate. And so, fighting down terror, she toiled on, dragging her disabled horse, until,

just before dawn, the exhausted creature refused to stir another foot.

Desperate, breathless, trembling on the verge of exhaustion, with the last remnants of nervous strength she stripped saddle and bridle from the animal; then her nerves gave way and she buried her face against her horse's reeking, heaving shoulders.

"I've got to go on, dear," she whispered; "I'll try to come back to you. . . . See what a pretty stream this is," she added, half hysterically, "and such lots of fresh, sweet grass. . . . Oh, my little horse—my little horse! I'm so tired—so tired!"

The horse turned his gentle head, mumbling her shoulder with soft, dusty lips; she stifled a sob, lifted saddle, saddlebags, and bridle and carried them up the rocky bank of the stream to a little hollow. Here she dropped them, unstrapped her revolver and placed it with them, then drew from the saddlebags a homespun gown, sunbonnet, and a pair of coarse shoes, and laid them out on the moss.

Fatigue rendered her limbs unsteady; her fingers twitched as she fumbled with button and buckle, but at last spurred boots, stockings, jacket, and dusty riding skirt fell from

her; undergarments dropped in a circle around her bare feet; she stepped out of them, paused to twist up her dark hair tightly, then, crossing the moss to the stream's edge, picked her way out among the boulders to the brimming rim of a pool.

In the exquisite shock of the water the blood whipped her skin; fatigue vanished through the crystal magic; shoulder-deep she waded, crimson-cheeked, then let herself drift, afloat, stretching out in ecstasy until every aching muscle thrilled with the delicious reaction.

Overhead, tree swallows darted through a sky of pink and saffron, pulsating with the promise of the sun; the tinted peak of a mountain, jaggedly mirrored in the unquiet pool, suddenly glowed crimson, and the reflections ran crisscross through the rocking water, lacing it with fiery needles.

She looked like some delicate dawn-sprite as she waded ashore—a slender, unreal shape in the rosy glow, while behind her, from the dim ravine, ghosts of the mountain mist floated, rising like a company of slim, white angels drifting to the sky.

All around her now the sweet, bewildered

murmur of purple martins grew into sustained melody; thrush and mocking bird, thrasher and cardinal, sang from every leafy slope; and through the rushing music of bird and pouring waterfall the fairy drumming of the cock-o'-the-pines rang out in endless, elfin reveille.

While she was managing to dry herself and dress, her horse limped off into the grassy swale below to drink in the stream and feed among the tender grasses.

Before she drew on the homespun gown she tucked her linen map into an inner skirt pocket, flat against her right thigh; then, fastening on the snabby skirt, she rolled up her riding habit, laid it with lantern, revolver, saddle, bridle, boots, and bags, in the hollow and covered all over with heaps of fragrant dead leaves and branches. It was the best she could do, and the time was short.

Her horse raised his wise, gentle head, and looked across the stream at her as she hastened past, then limped stiffly toward her.

"Oh, I can't stand it if you hobble after me!" she wailed under her breath. "Dearest—dearest—I will surely come back to you. Good-by—good-by!"

On the crest of the ridge she cast one swift,

tearful glance behind. The horse, evidently feeling better, was rolling in the grass, all four hoofs waving at the sky. And she laughed through the tears, and drew from her pockets a morsel of dry bread which she had saved from the saddlebags. This she nibbled as she walked, taking her bearings from the sun and the sweep of the southern mountain slopes; and listening, always listening, for the jingle and clank of the Confederate flying battery that was surely following along somewhere on that parallel road which she had missed, hidden from her view only by a curtain of forest, the width of which she had no time to investigate. Nor did she know for certain that she had outstripped the Confederate column in the race for the pass—a desperate race, although the men of that flying column, which was hastening to turn the pass into a pitfall for the North, had not the faintest suspicion that the famous Special Messenger was racing with them to forestall them, or even that their secret was no longer a secret.

In hot haste from the south hills she had come to warn Benton's division of the ambuscade preparing for it, riding by highway and byway, her heart in her mouth, taking every

perilous chance. And now, at the last moment, here in the West Virginian Mountains, almost within sight of the pass itself, disaster threatened—the human machine was giving out.

There were just two chances that Benton might yet be saved—that his leisurely advance had, by some miracle, already occupied the pass, or, if not, that she could get through and meet Benton in time to stop him.

She had been told that there was a cabin at the pass, and that the mountaineer who lived there was a Union man.

Thinking of these things as she crossed the ridge, she came suddenly into full view of the pass. It lay there just below her; there could be no mistake. A stony road wound along the stream, flanked by forest-clad heights; she recognized the timber bridge over the ravine, which had been described to her, the corduroy way across the swamp, the single, squat cabin crowning a half-cleared hillock. She realized at a glance the awful trap that this silent, deadly place could be turned into; for one rushing moment her widening eyes could almost see blue masses of men in disorder, crushed into that horrible defile; her ears

seemed to ring with their death cries, the rippling roar of rifle fire. Then, with a sharp, indrawn breath, she hastened forward, taking the descent at a run. And at the same moment three gray-jacketed cavalrymen cantered into the road below, crossed the timber bridge at a gallop, and disappeared in the pass, carbines poised.

She had arrived a minute too late; the pass was closed!

Toiling breathlessly up the bushy hillock, crouching, bending, creeping across the stony open where scant grass grew in a meager garden, she reached the cabin. It was empty; a fire smoldered under a kettle in which potatoes were boiling; ash cakes crisped on the hearth, bacon sizzled in a frying pan set close to the embers.

But where was the tenant?

A shout from the road below brought her to the door; then she dropped flat on her stomach, crawled forward, and looked over the slope.

A red-haired old man, in his shirt sleeves, carrying a fishing pole, was running down the road, chased by two gray-jacketed troopers. He ran well, throwing away his pole and the

string of slimy fish he had been carrying; but, half way across the stream, they rode him down and caught him, driving their horses straight into the shallow flood; and a few moments later a fresh squad of cavalry trotted up, forced the prisoner to mount a led horse, and, surrounding him, galloped rapidly away southward.

The Special Messenger lay perfectly still and flat, watching, listening, waiting, coolly alert for a shadow of a chance to slip out and through the pass; but there was to be no such chance now, for a dozen troopers came into view, running their lean horses at top speed, and wheeled straight into the pass. A full squadron followed, their solid galloping waking clattering echoes among the rocks. Then her delicate ears caught a distant, ominous sound—nearer, louder, ringing, thudding, jarring, pounding—the racket of field artillery arriving at full speed.

And into sight dashed a flying battery, guns and limbers bouncing and thumping, whips cracking, chains crashing, the six-horse teams on a dead run.

An officer drew bridle and threw his horse on its haunches; the first team rushed on to

the pass with a clash and clank of wheels and chains, swung wide in a demi-tour, dropped a dully glistening gun, and then came trampling back. The second, third, and fourth teams, guns and caissons, swerved to the right of the hillock and came plunging up the bushy slope, horses straining and scrambling, trampling through the wretched garden to the level grass above.

One by one the gun teams swung in a half circle, each dropped its mud-spattered gun, the cannoneers sprang to unhook the trails, the frantic, half-maddened horses were lashed to the rear.

The Special Messenger rose quietly to her feet, and at the same instant a passing cannoneer turned and saw her in the doorway.

"Hey!" he exclaimed; "what you doin' thar?"

A very young major, spurring up the slope, caught sight of her, too.

"This won't do!" he began excitedly, pushing his sweating horse up to the door. "I'm sorry, but it won't do—" He hesitated, perplexed, eyeing this slim, dark-eyed girl, who stood as though dazed there in her ragged homespun and naked feet.

Colonel Carrick, passing at a canter, turned in his saddle, calling out:

"Major Kent! Keep that woman here! It's too late to send her back."

The boy-major saluted, then turned to the girl again:

"Who are you?" he asked, vexed.

She seemed unable to reply.

A cannoneer said respectfully:

"Reckon the li'l gal's jes' natch'ally skeered o' we-uns, Major, seein' how the caval'y ketched her paw down thar in the crick."

The Major said briefly:

"Your father is a Union man, but nobody is going to hurt him. I'd send you to the rear, too, but there's no time now. Please go in and shut that door. I'll see that nobody disturbs you."

As she was closing the door the young Major called after her:

"Where's the well?"

As she did not know she only stared at him as though terrified.

"All right," he said, more gently. "Don't be frightened. I'll come back and talk to you in a little while."

As she shut the door she saw the cannon at

the pass limber up, wheel, and go bumping up the hill to rejoin its bespattered fellows on the knoll.

An artilleryman came along and dropped a bundle of picks and shovels which he was carrying to the gunners, who had begun the emplacements; the boyish Major dismounted, subduing his excitement with a dignified frown; and for a while he was very fussy and very busy, aiding the battery captain in placing the guns and verifying the depression.

The position of the masked battery was simply devilish; every gun, hidden completely in the oak-scrub, was now trained on the pass.

Opposite, across the stream, long files of gray infantry were moving to cover among the trees; behind, a battalion arrived to support the guns; below, the cavalry had begun to leave the pass; troopers, dismounted, were carefully removing from the road all traces of their arrival.

Leaning there by the window, the Special Messenger counted the returning fours as troop after troop retired southward and disappeared around the bend of the road.

For a while the picks and shovels of the gunners sounded noisily; concealed riflemen,

across the creek, were also busy intrenching. But by noon all sound had ceased in the sunny ravine; there was nothing to be seen from below; not a human voice echoed; not a pick-stroke; only the sweet, rushing sound of the stream filled the silence; only the shadows of the branches moved.

Warned again by the sentinels to close the battered window and keep the door shut, she still watched the gunners, through the dirty window panes, where they now lay under the bushes beside their guns. There was no conversation among them; some of the artillerymen seemed to be asleep; some sprawled belly-deep in the ferns, chewing twigs or idly scraping holes in the soil; a few lay about, eating the remnants of the morning's scanty rations, chewing strips of bacon rind, and licking the last crumbs from the palms of their grimy hands.

Along the bush-hidden parapet of earth, heaps of amunition lay—cannister and common shell. She recognized these, and, with a shudder, a long row of smaller projectiles on which soldiers were screwing copper caps—French hand grenades, brought in by blockade runners, and fashioned to explode on impact—

so close was to be the coming slaughter of her own people in the road below.

Toward one o'clock the gunners were served noon rations. She watched them eating for a while, then, nerveless, turned back into the single room of the cabin and opened the rear door- so gently and noiselessly that the boyish staff-major who was seated on the sill did not glance around until she spoke, asking his permission to remain there.

"You mustn't open that door," he said, looking up, surprised by the sweetness of the voice which he heard now for the first time.

"How can anybody see me from the pass?" she asked innocently. "That is what you are afraid of, isn't it?"

He shot a perplexed and slightly suspicious glance at her, then the frowning importance faded from his beardless face; he bit a piece out of the soggy corncake he was holding and glanced up at her again, amiably conscious of her attractions; besides, her voice and manner had been a revelation. Evidently her father had had her educated at some valley school remote from these raw solitudes.

So he smiled at her, quite willing to be argued with and entertained; and at his sug-

gestion she shyly seated herself on the sill outside in the sunlight.

"Have you lived here long?" he asked encouragingly.

"Not very," she said, eyes downcast, her clasped hands lying loosely over one knee. The soft, creamy-tinted fingers occupied his attention for a moment; the hand resembled the hand of "quality"; so did the ankle and delicate arch of her naked foot, half imprisoned in the coarse shoe under her skirt's edge.

He had often heard that some of these mountaineers had pretty children; here, evidently, was a most fascinating example.

"Is your mother living?" he asked pleasantly.

"No, sir."

He thought to himself that she must resemble her dead mother, because the man whom the cavalry had caught in the creek was a coarse-boned, red-headed ruffian, quite impossible to reconcile as the father of this dark-haired, dark-eyed, young forest creature, with her purely-molded limbs and figure and sensitive fashion of speaking. He turned to her curiously:

"So you have not always lived here on the mountain."

"No, not always."

"I suppose you spent a whole year away from home at boarding-school," he suggested with patronizing politeness.

"Yes, six years at Edgewood," she said in a low voice.

"What?" he exclaimed, repeating the name of the most fashionable Southern institute for young ladies. "Why, I had a sister there—Margaret Kent. Were *you* there? And did you ever—er—see my sister?"

"I knew her," said the Special Messenger absently.

He was very silent for a while, thinking to himself.

"It must have been her mother; that measly old man we caught in the creek is 'poor white' all through." And, munching thoughtfully again on his soggy corncake, he pondered over the strange fate of this fascinating young girl, fashioned to slay the hearts of Southern chivalry—so young, so sweet, so soft of voice and manner, condemned to live life through alone in this shaggy solitude—fated, doubtless, to mate with some loose,

lank, shambling, hawk-eyed rustic of the peaks —doomed to bear sickly children, and to fade and dry and wither in the full springtide of her youth and loveliness.

"It's too bad," he said fretfully, unconscious that he spoke aloud, unaware, too, that she had risen and was moving idly, with bent head, among the weeds of the truck garden —edging nearer, nearer, to a dark, round object about the size of a small apple, which had rolled into a furrow where the ground was all cut up by the wheel tracks of artillery and hoofs of heavy horses.

There was scarcely a chance that she could pick it up unobserved; her ragged skirts covered it; she bent forward as though to tie her shoe, but a sentinel was watching her, so she straightened up carelessly and stood, hands on her hips, dragging one foot idly to and fro, until she had covered the small, round object with sand and gravel.

That object was a loaded French hand grenade, fitted with percussion primer; and it lay last at the end of a long row of similar grenades along the shaded side of the house.

The sentry in the bushes had been watching her; and now he came out along the edge

of the laurel tangle, apparently to warn her away, but seeing a staff officer so near her he halted, satisfied that authority had been responsible for her movements. Besides, he had not noticed that a grenade was missing; neither had the major, who now rose and sauntered toward her, balancing his field glasses in one hand.

"There's ammunition under these bushes," he said pleasantly; "don't go any nearer, please. Those grenades *might* explode if anyone stumbled over them. They're bad things to handle."

"Will there be a battle here?" she asked, recoiling from the deadly little bombs.

The Major said, stroking the down on his short upper lip:

"There will probably be a skirmish. I do not dare let you leave this spot till the first shot is fired. But as soon as you hear it you had better run as fast as you can"—he pointed with his field glasses—"to that little ridge over there, and lie down behind the rocks on the other side. Do you understand?"

"Yes—I think so."

"And you'll lie there very still until it is—over?"

"I understand. May I go immediately and hide there?"

"Not yet," he said gently.

"Why?"

"Because your father is a Union man. . . . And you are Union, too, are you not?"

"Yes," she said, smiling; "are you afraid of me?"

A slight flush stained his smooth, sunburnt skin; then he laughed.

"A little afraid," he admitted; "I find you dangerous, but not in the way you mean. I—I do not mean to offend you——"

But she smiled audaciously at him, looking prettier than ever; and his heart gave a surprised little jump at her unsuspected capabilities.

"Why are you afraid of me?" she asked, looking at him with her engaging little smile. In her eyes a bewitching brightness sparkled, partly veiled by the long lashes; and she laughed again, poised there in the sunshine, hands on her hips, delicately provoking his reply.

And, crossing the chasm which her coquetry had already bridged, he paid her the quick, reckless, boyish compliment she invited—a lit-

tle flowery, perhaps, possibly a trifle stilted, but very Southern; and she shrugged like a spoiled court beauty, nose uptilted, and swept him with a glance from half-closed lids, almost insolent.

The sentry in the holly and laurel thicket stared hard at them both. And he saw his major break off a snowy Cherokee rose and, bending at his slim, sashed waist, present the blossom with the courtly air inbred through many generations; and he saw a ragged mountaineer girl accept it with all the dainty and fastidious mockery of a coquette of the golden age, and fasten it where her faded bodice edged the creamy skin of her breast.

What the young major said to her after that, bending nearer and nearer, the sentry could not hear, for the major's voice was very low, and the slow, smiling reply was lower still.

But the major straightened as though he had been shot through and through, and bowed and walked away among the weeds toward a group of officers under the trees, who were steadily watching the pass through their leveled field glasses.

Once the major turned around to look back;

once she turned on the threshold. Her cheeks were pinker; her eyes sparkled.

The emotions of the Special Messenger were very genuine and rather easily excited.

But when she had closed the door, and leaned wearily against it, the color soon faded from her face and the sparkle died out in her dark eyes. Pale, alert, intelligent, she stood there minute after minute, searching the single room with anxious, purposeless eyes; then, driven into restless motion by the torturing tension of anxiety, she paced the loose boards like a tigress, up and down, head lowered, hands clasped against her mouth, worrying the fingers with the edge of her teeth.

Outside, through the dirty window glass, she could see sentries in the bushes, all looking steadily in the same direction; groups of officers under the trees still focused their glasses on the pass. By and by she saw some riflemen in butternut jeans climb into trees, rifles slung across their backs, and disappear far up in the foliage, still climbing.

Toward five o'clock, as she was eating the bacon and hoe cakes which she had found in the hut, two infantry officers opened the door, stared at her, then, without ceremony, drew a

rough ladder from the corner, set it outside, and the older officer climbed to the roof.

She heard him call down to the lieutenant below:

"No use; I can't see any better up here. . . . They ought to set a signal man on that rock, yonder!"

Other officers came over; one or two spoke respectfully to her, but she did not answer. Finally they all cleared out; and she dragged a bench to the back door, which swung open a little way, and, alert against surprise, very cautiously drew from the inner pocket her linen contour map and studied it, glancing every second or two out through the crack in the door.

Nobody disturbed her; with hesitating forefinger she traced out what pretended to be a path dominating the northern entrance of the pass, counted the watercourses and gullies crossing the ascent, tried to fix the elevations in her mind.

As long as she dared she studied the soiled map, but, presently, a quick shadow fell across the threshold, and she thrust the map into the concealed pocket and sprang to open the door.

"Coming military events cast foreboding shadows," she said, somewhat breathless.

"Am I a foreboding and military event?" asked the youthful major, laughing. "What do I threaten, please?"

"Single combat," she said demurely, smiling at him under half-veiled lids. And the same little thrill passed through him again, and the quick color rose to his smooth, sunburnt face.

"I was ready to beat a retreat on sight," he said; "now I surrender."

"I make no prisoners," she replied in airy disdain.

"You give no quarter?"

"None. . . . Why did you come back?"

"You said I might."

"Did I? I had quite forgotten what I had said to you. When are you going to let me go?"

His face fell and he looked up at her, troubled.

"I'm afraid you don't understand," he said. "We dare not send you away under escort now, because horses' feet make a noise, and some prowling Yankee vidette may be at this very moment hanging about the pass——"

"Oh," she said, "you prefer to let me remain here and be shot?"

He said, reddening: "At the first volley you are to go with an escort across the ridge. I told you that, didn't I?"

But she remained scornful, mute and obstinate, pretty head bent, twisting the folds of her faded skirt.

"Do you think I would let you remain here if there were any danger?" he asked in a lower voice.

"How long am I to be kept here?" she asked pettishly.

"Until the Yankees come through—and I can't tell you when that will be, because I don't know myself."

"Are they in the pass?"

"We don't know. Everybody is beginning to be worried. We can't see very far into that ravine——"

"Then why don't you go where you *can* see?" she said with a shrug.

"Where?" he asked, surprised.

"Didn't you know that there is a path above the pass?"

"A path!"

"Certainly. I can show you if you wish.

You ought to be able to see to the north end of the pass—if I am not mistaken——"

"Wait a moment!" he said excitedly. "I want you to take me there—just a second, to speak to those officers—I'm coming back immediately——"

And he started on a run across the ravaged garden, holding his sabre close, midway, by the scabbard.

That was her chance. Picking up her faded sunbonnet, she stepped from the threshold, swinging it carelessly by one string. The sentries were looking after the major; she dropped her sunbonnet, stooped to recover it, and straightened up, the hidden hand grenade slipping from the crown of the bonnet into her bodice between her breasts.

A thousand eyes seemed watching her as, a trifle pale, she strolled on aimlessly, swinging the recovered sunbonnet; she listened, shivering, for the stern challenge to halt, the breathless shout of accusation, the pursuing trample of heavy boots. And at last, quaking in every limb, she ventured to lift her eyes. Nobody seemed to be looking her way; the artillery pickets were still watching the pass; the group of officers posted under the trees still focused

"She dropped her sunbonnet—stooped to recover it."

their glasses in that direction; the young major was already returning across the garden toward her.

A sharp throb of hope set her pulses bounding—she had, safe in her bosom, the means of warning her own people now; all she needed was a safe-conduct from that knoll, and here it was coming, brought by this eager, boyish officer, hastening so blithely toward her, his long, dark shadow clinging like death to his spurred heels as he ran.

Would she guide him to some spot where it was possible to see the whole length of the pass?

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak, and turned, he at her side, into the woods.

If her map was not betraying her once more the path *must* follow the edges of the pass, high up among those rocks and trees somewhere. There was only one way of finding it—to climb upward to the overhanging ledges.

Raising her eyes toward the leafy heights, it seemed to her incredible that any path could lead along that wall of rock, which leaned outward over the ravine.

But somehow she must mount there; somehow she must manage to remain there unmo-

lested, ready, the moment a single Union vidette cantered into the pass, to hurl her explosive messenger into the depths below—a startling but unmistakable signal to the blue column advancing so unsuspiciously into that defile of hell.

As they climbed upward together through the holly-scrub she remembered that she must not slip, for the iron weight in her bosom would endure no rough caress from rock or earth.

How heavy it was—how hot and rough, chafing her body—this little iron sphere, with a dozen deaths sealed up inside!

Toiling upward, planting her roughly shod feet with fearful precision, she tried to imagine what it would be like if the tiny bomb in her bosom exploded—tried to picture her terrified soul tearing skyward out of bodily annihilation.

"It is curious," she thought with a slight shudder, "how afraid I always am—how deeply, deeply afraid of death. God knows why I go on."

The boy beside her found the ascent difficult; spur and sabre impeded him; once he lurched heavily against her, and his quick,

stammered apology was cut short by the dreadful pallor of her face, for she was deadly afraid of the bomb.

"Did I hurt you?" he faltered, impulsively laying his hand on her arm.

She shivered and shook off his hand, forcing a gay smile. And they went on together, upward, always upward, her pretty, provocative eyes meeting his at intervals, her heart beating faster, death at her breast.

He was a few yards ahead when he called back to her in a low, warning voice that he had found a path, and she hastened up the rocks to where he stood.

Surely here was a trail winding along the very edge of the ledges, under masses of overhanging rock—some dizzy runway of prehistoric man, perhaps trodden, too, by wolf and panther, and later by the lank mountaineer hunter or smuggler creeping to some eerie unsuspected by any living creature save, perhaps, the silver-headed eagles soaring through the fathomless azure vault above.

Below, the pass lay; but they could see no farther into it at first. However, as they advanced cautiously, clinging to the outjutting cliff, which seemed maliciously striving to

push them out into space, by degrees crag and trail turned westward and more of the pass came into view—a wide, smooth cleft in the mountain, curving away toward the north.

A few steps more and the trail ended abruptly in a wide, grassy space set with trees, sloping away gently to the west, chopped off sheer to the east, where it terminated in a mossy shelf overlooking the ravine.

Only a few rods away the dusk of the pass was cut by a glimmer of sunlight; it was the northern entrance.

Something else was glimmering there, too; dozens of dancing points of white fire—sunshine on buckle, button, bit and sabre. And the officer beside her uttered a low, fierce cry and jerked his field glasses free from the case.

"Their cavalry!" he breathed. "The Yankees are entering the pass, so help me God!" And he drew his revolver.

So help him God! Something dark and round flew across his line of vision, curving out into space, dropping, dropping into the depths below. A clattering report, a louder racket as the rocky echoes, crossing and re-crossing, struck back at the clamoring cliffs.

So help him God! Half stunned, he stum-

"White-faced, desperate, she clung to him with the tenacity of a lynx."

bled to his feet, his dazed eyes still blurred with a vision of horsemen, vaguely seen through vapors, stampeding northward; and, at the same instant, she sprang at him, striking the drawn revolver from his hand, tearing the sabre free and flinging it into the gulf. White-faced, desperate, she clung to him with the tenacity of a lynx, winding her lithe limbs around and under his, tripping him to his knees.

Over and over they rolled, struggling in the grass, twisting, straining, slipping down the westward slope.

"You—devil!" he panted, as her dark eyes flashed level with his. "I've got—you—anyhow——"

Her up-flung elbow, flexed like a steel wedge, caught him in the throat; they fell over the low ridge, writhing in each other's embrace, down the slope, over and over, faster, faster—crack!—his head struck a ledge, and he straightened out, quivering, then lay very, very still and heavy in her arms.

Fiercely excited, she tore strips from her skirt, twisted them, forced him over on his face, and tied his wrists fast.

Then, leaving him inert there on the moss,

she ran back for his revolver, found it, opened it, made certain that the cylinder was full, and, flinging one last glance down the pass, hastened to her prisoner.

Her prisoner opened his eyes; the dark bruise on his forehead was growing redder and wetter.

"Stand up!" she said, cocking her weapon.

The boy, half stupefied, struggled to his knees, then managed to rise.

"Go forward along that path!"

For a full minute he stood erect, motionless, eyes fixed on her; then shame stained him to the temples; he turned, head bent, and walked forward, wrists tightly tied behind him.

And behind him, weapon swinging, followed the Special Messenger in her rags, pallid, dishevelled, her dark eyes dim with pity.

VIII

EVER AFTER

—And they married, and had many children, and lived happy ever after. *Old Tales.*

FOR two days the signal flags had been talking to each other; for two nights the fiery torches had been conversing about that beleaguered city in the South.

Division after division, corps after corps, were moving forward; miles of wagons, miles of cavalry in sinuous columns unending, blackened every valley road. Later, the heavy

Parrots and big Dahlgrens of the siege train stirred in their parked lethargy, and, enormous muzzles tilted, began to roll out through the valley in heavy majesty, shaking the ground as they passed, guarded by masses of red artillerymen.

Day after day crossed cannon flapped on red and white guidons; day after day the teams of powerful horses, harnessed in twenties, trampled through the valley, headed south.

Off the sandy headland a Federal gunboat lay at anchor, steam up—a blackened, chunky, grimy thing of timber and iron plates, streaked with rust, smoke blowing horizontally from her funnels. And day after day she consulted hill and headland with her kaleidoscopic strings of flags; and headland and hill talked back with fluttering bunting by day and with torches of fire by night.

From her window in the emergency hospital the Special Messenger could see those flags as she sat pensively sewing. Sometimes she mended the remnants of her silken stockings and the last relics of the fine under linen left her; sometimes she scraped lint or sewed poultice bandages, or fashioned havelocks for regiments southward bound.

She had grown slimmer, paler, of late; her beautiful hair had been sheared close; her head, covered with thick, clustering curls, was like the shapely head of a boy. Limbs and throat were still smooth and round, but had become delicate almost to leanness.

The furlough she had applied for had not yet arrived; she seemed to remain as hopelessly entangled in the web of war as ever, watching, without emotion, the old spider. Death, busy all around her, tireless, sinister, absorbed in his own occult affairs.

The routine varied but little: at dawn surgeons' call chorused by the bugles; files of haggard, limping, clay-faced men, headed by sergeants, all converging toward the hospital; later, in every camp, drums awaking; distant strains of regimental bands at parade; and all day and all night the far rumble of railroad trains, the whistle of locomotives, and, if the wind veered, the faint, melancholy cadence of the bells swinging for a clear track and right of way.

Sometimes, sewing by the open window, she thought of her brother, now almost thirteen—thought, trembling, of his restless letters from his Northern school, demanding of her that

he be permitted to take his part in war for the Union, begging to be enlisted at least as drummer in a nine-months' regiment which was recruiting within sight of the dormitory where he fretted over Cæsar and the happy warriors of the Tenth Legion.

Sometimes, mending the last shreds of her cambric finery, she thought of her girlhood, of the white porches at Sandy River; and always, always, the current of her waking dream swung imperceptibly back to that swift crisis in her life—a flash of love—love at the first glance—a word! and his regiment, sabres glittering, galloping peli-mell into the thundering inferno between the hills. . . . And sunset; and the wounded passing by wagon loads, piled in the blood-soaked hay; and the glimpse of his limp gold-and-yellow sleeve—and her own white bed, and her lover of a day lying there—dead——

At this point in the dream-tale her eyes usually became too dim to see the stitches, and there was nothing to do except to wait until the tired eyes were dry again.

The sentry on duty knocked, opened the door, and admitted a weather-stained aide-de-camp, warning her respectfully:

"Orders for you, ma'am."

The Special Messenger cleared her eyes, breathing unevenly, and unsealed the dispatch which the officer handed her.

When she read it she opened a door and called sharply to a hospital orderly, who came running:

"Fit me with a rebel cavalry uniform—you've got that pile of disinfected clothing in the basement. I also want one of our own cavalry uniforms to wear over it—anything that has been cleaned. Quick, Williams; I've only a few minutes to saddle! And bring me that bundle of commissions taken from the rebel horsemen that were brought in yesterday."

And to the mud-splashed aide-de-camp who stood waiting, looking out of the window at the gunboat which was now churning in toward the wharf, billows of inky smoke pouring from the discolored stacks:

"Please tell the general that I go aboard in half an hour. Tell him I'll do my best." In a lower voice: "Ask him not to forget my brother—if matters go wrong with me. He has given me his word. . . . And I think that is all, thank you."

The A.-D.-C. said, standing straight, hollow-backed, spurred heels together:

"Orders are verbally modified, madam."

"What?"

"If you do not care to go—it is not an order—merely a matter of volunteering. . . . The general makes no question of your courage if you choose to decline."

She said, looking at the officer a little wearily:

"Thank the general. It will give me much pleasure to fulfill his request. Ask him to bear my brother in mind; that is all."

The A.-D.-C. bowed to her, cap in hand, then went out, making considerable racket with sabre and boots.

Half an hour later a long, deep, warning blast from the gunboat's whistle set the echoes flying through the hills.

Aboard, leading her horse, the Special Messenger, booted and spurred, in a hybrid uniform of a subaltern of regulars, handed the bridle to a sailor and turned to salute the quarterdeck.

The United States gunboat, *Kiowa*, dropped anchor at the railroad wharf two days later,

and ran out a blackened gangplank. Over it the Special Messenger, wrapped in her rubber cloak, led her horse to shore, mounted, and galloped toward the hill where the flag of corps headquarters was flapping in the wet wind.

The rain ended as she rode inland; ahead of her a double rainbow glowed and slowly faded to a rosy nimbus.

Corps headquarters was heavily impressive and paternally polite, referring her to headquarters of the unattached cavalry division.

She remounted, setting her horse at an easy canter for the intervening two miles, riding through acres of tents and vistas of loaded wagon trains; and at last an exceedingly ornamental staff officer directed her to her destination, and a few moments later she dismounted and handed her bridle to an orderly, whose curiously fashioned forage cap seemed strangely familiar.

As the Special Messenger entered his tent and saluted, the colonel of the Fourth Missouri Cavalry rose from a camp chair, standing over six feet in his boots. He was magnificently built; his closely clipped hair was dark and curly, his skin smoothly bronzed and

flushed at the cheek bones; his allure that of a very splendid and grave and youthful god, save for the gayly impudent uptwist of his short mustache and the stilled humor in his steady eyes.

His uniform was entirely different from the regulation—he wore a blue forage cap with short, heavy visor of unpolished leather shadowing the bridge of his nose; his dark blue jacket was shell-cut; over it he wore a slashed dolman trimmed at throat, wrists and edges with fur; his breeches were buff; his boots finished at the top with a yellow cord forming a heart-shaped knot in front; at his heels trailed the most dainty and rakish of sabres, light, graceful, curved almost like a scimiter.

All this is what the Special Messenger saw as she entered, instantly recognizing a regimental uniform which she had never seen but once before in her brief life. And straight through her heart struck a pain swift as a dagger thrust, and her hand in its buckskin gauntlet fell limply from the peak of her visor, and the color died in her cheeks.

What the colonel of the Fourth Missouri saw before him was a lad, slim, rather pale,

dark-eyed, swathed to the chin in the folds of a wet poncho; and he said, examining her musingly and stroking the ends of his curt mustache upward:

"I understood from General Sheridan that the Special Messenger was to report to me. Where is she?"

The lightning pain of the shock when she recognized the uniform interfered with breath and speech; confused, she raised her gloved hand and laid it unconsciously over her heart; and the colonel of the Fourth Missouri waited.

"I am the Special Messenger," she said faintly.

For a moment he scarcely understood that this slender young fellow, with dark hair as closely clipped and as curly as his own, could be a woman. Stern surprise hardened his narrowing gaze; he stood silent, handsome head high, looking down at her; then slowly the latent humor flickered along the edges of lip and lid, curbed instantly as he bowed, faultless, handsome—only the persistently upturned mustache impairing the perfectly detached and impersonal decorum with a warning of the *beau sabreur* behind it all.

"Will you be seated, madam?"

"Thank you."

She sat down; the wet poncho was hot and she shifted it, throwing one end across her shoulder. In her uniform she appeared willowy and slim, built like a boy, and with nothing of that graceful awkwardness which almost inevitably betrays such masqueraders. For her limbs were straight at the knees and faultlessly coupled, and there seemed to be the adolescent's smooth lack of development in the scarcely accented hips—only a straightly flowing harmony of proportion—a lad's grace muscularly undeveloped.

Two leather straps crossed her breast, one weighted with field glasses, the other with a pouch. From the latter she drew her credentials and would have risen to present them, but the colonel of the Fourth Missouri detained her with a gesture, himself rose, and took the papers from her hand.

While he sat reading, she, hands clasped in her lap, gazed at his well-remembered uniform, busy with her memories once more, and the sweetness of them—and the pain.

They were three years old, these memories, now glimmering alive again amid the whiten-

ing ashes of the past; only three years—and centuries seemed to dim the landmarks and bar the backward path that she was following to her girlhood!

She thought of the white-pillared house as it stood at the beginning of the war; the severing of old ties, the averted faces of old friends and neighbors; the mortal apprehension, endless suspense; the insurgent flags fluttering from porch and portico along the still, tree-shaded street; her own heart-breaking isolation in the community when Sumter fell—she an orphan, alone there with her brother and bedridden grandfather.

And she remembered the agony that followed the news from Bull Run, the stupor that fell upon her; the awful heat of that battle summer; her evening prayers, kneeling there beside her brother; the red moons that rose, enormous, menacing, behind the trees; and the widow bird calling, calling to the dead that never answer more.

Her dead? Why *hers*? A chance regiment passing—cavalry wearing the uniform and number of the Fourth Missouri. Ah! she could see them again, sun-scorched, dusty, fours crowding on fours, trampling past. She

could see a young girl in white, fastening the long-hidden flag to its halyards as the evening light faded on the treetops! . . . And then—and then—*he* came—into her life, into her house, into her heart, alas!—tall, lean, calm-eyed, yellow-haired, wrapped in the folds of his long, blue mantle! . . . And she saw him again—a few moments before his regiment charged into that growling thunder beyond the hills somewhere.

And a third time, and the last, she saw him, deathly still, lying on her own bed, and a medical officer pulling the sheet up over his bony face.

The colonel of the Fourth Missouri was looking curiously at her; she started, cleared the dimness from her eyes, and steadied the trembling underlip.

After a moment's silence the colonel said: "You undertake this duty willingly?"

She nodded, quietly touching her eyes with her handkerchief.

"There is scarcely a chance for you," he observed with affected carelessness.

She lifted her shoulders in weary disdain of that persistent shadow called danger, which

had long since become too familiar to count very heavily.

"I am not afraid—if that is what you mean. Do you think you can get me through?"

The colonel said coolly: "I expect to do my part. Have you a rebel uniform?"

She nodded.

"Where is it?"

"On me—under this."

The colonel looked at her; a slight shud[illegible] passed over him.

"These orders suggest that I start before sunset," he said. "Meanwhile this tent is yours. My orderly will serve you. The regiment will move out about sunset with some six hundred sabres and Gray's Rhode Island flying battery."

He walked to the tent door; she followed.

"Is that your horse?" he asked.

"Yes, Colonel."

"Fit for the work?" turning to look at her.

"Yes, sir."

"And *you*?"

She smiled; through the open tent a misty bar of sunshine fell across her face, turning the smooth skin golden. Outside a dismounted

trooper on guard presented his carbine as the tall, young colonel strode out. An orderly joined him; they stood a moment consulting in whispers, then the orderly ran for his saddled horse, mounted, and rode off through the lanes of the cavalry camp.

From the tent door the Special Messenger looked out into the camp. Under the base of a grassy hill hundreds of horses were being watered at a brook now discolored by the recent rains; beyond, on a second knoll, the guns of a flying battery stood parked. She could see the red trimmings on the gunners' jackets as they were lounging about in the grass.

The view from the tent door was extensive; a division, at least, lay encamped within range of the eye; two roads across the hills were full of wagons moving south and east; along another road, stretching far into the valley, masses of cavalry were riding—apparently an entire brigade—but too far away for her to hear the trample of the horses.

From where she stood, however, she could make out the course of a fourth road by the noise of an endless, moving column of horses. At times, above the hillside, she could see their

heads, and the enormous canvas-covered muzzles of siege guns; and the racket of hoofs, the powerful crunching and grinding of wheels, the cries of teamsters united in a dull, steady uproar that never ceased.

From their camp, troopers of the Fourth Missouri were idly watching the artillery passing—hundreds of sunburned cavalrymen seated along the hillside, feet dangling, exchanging gibes and jests with the drivers of the siege train below. But from where she stood she could see nothing except horses' heads tossing, blue caps of mounted men, a crimson guidon flapping, or the sun glittering on the slender, curved blade of some officer's sabre as he signaled.

North, east, west, south—the whole land seemed to be covered with moving men and beasts and wagons; flags fluttered on every eminence; tents covered plowed fields, pastures, meadows; smoke hung over all, crowning the green woods with haze, veiling hollows, rolling along the railway in endless yellow billows.

The rain had washed the sky clean, but again this vast, advancing host was soiling heaven and blighting earth as it passed over

the land toward that beleaguered city in the South.

War! Everywhere the monotony of this awful panorama, covering her country day after day, month after month, year after year—war, always and everywhere and in every stage—hordes of horses, hordes of men, endless columns of deadly engines! Everywhere, always, death, or the preparation for death—every road and footpath crammed with it, every field trampled by it, every woodland shattered by it, every stream running thick with its pollution. The sour smell of marching men, the stale taint of unclean fires, the stench of beasts—the acrid, indescribable odor that hangs on the sweating flanks of armies seemed to infect sky and earth.

A trooper, munching an apple and carrying a truss of hay, passed, cap cocked rakishly, sabre banging at his heels; and she called to him and he came up, easily respectful under the grin of bodily well being.

"How long have you served in this regiment?" she asked.

He swallowed the bite of apple which crowded out his freckled cheeks: "Three years, sir."

"We were there. I know the [illegible] all we had [illegible]

She drew involuntarily nearer the tent door.

"Then—you were at Sandy River—three years ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you remember the battle there?"

The soldier looked doubtful. "We was there—I know that; yes, an' we had a fight——"

"Yes—near a big white house."

The soldier nodded. "I guess so; I don't seem to place no big white house——"

She asked calmly: "Your regiment had a mounted band once?"

He brightened.

"Yes, sir-ee! They played us in at Sandy River—and they got into it, too, and was cut all to pieces!"

She motioned assent wearily; then, with an effort: "You don't know, perhaps, where he—where their bandmaster was buried?"

"Sir?"

"The bandmaster of the Fourth Missouri? You remember him—that tall, thin young officer who led them with his sabre—who sat his horse like a colonel of regulars—and wore a cap of fur like—like a hussar of some militia State guard——"

"Well, you must mean Captain Stanley, who was at that time bandmaster of our regiment. He went in that day at Sandy River when our mounted band was cut to pieces. Orders was to play us in, an' he done it."

There was a silence.

"Where is he—buried?" she asked calmly.

"Buried? Why, *he* ain't dead, is he?"

"He died at Sandy River—that day," she said gently. "Don't you remember?"

"No, sir; our bandmaster wasn't killed at Sandy River."

She looked at him amazed, almost frightened.

"What do you mean? He is dead. I—saw him die."

"It must have been some other bandmaster—not Captain Stanley."

"I saw the bandmaster of your regiment, the Fourth Missouri Cavalry, brought into that big white house and laid on my—on a bed——" She stared at the boy, caught him by the sleeve: "He is dead, isn't he? Do you know what you are telling me? Do you understand what I am saying?"

"Yes, sir. Captain Stanley was our bandmaster—he wasn't captain then, of course.

He played us in at Sandy River—by God! I oughter know, because I got some cut up m'self."

"You—you tell me that he wasn't killed?" she repeated, steadying herself against the canvas flap.

"No, sir. I heard tell he was badly hurt—seems like I kinder remember—oh, yes!" The man's face lighted up. "Yes, sir; Captain Stanley, he had a close shave! It sorter comes back to me now, how the burial detail fetched him back saying they wasn't going to bury no man that twitched when they shut his coffin. Yes, sir—but it's three years and a man forgets, and I've seen—things—lots of such things in three years with Baring's dragoons. Yes, sir."

She closed her eyes; a dizziness swept over her and she swayed where she stood.

"Is he here?"

"Who? Captain Stanley? Yes, sir. Why, he's captain of the Black Horse troop—F, third squadron. . . . They're down that lane near the trees. Shall I take you there?"

She shook her head, holding tightly to the canvas flap; and the trooper, saluting easily, resumed his truss of hay, hitched his belt,

cocked his forage cap, and went off whistling.

All that sunny afternoon she lay on the colonel's camp bed, hands tightly clenched on her breast, eyes closed sometimes, sometimes wide open, gazing at the sun spots crawling on the tent wall.

To her ears came bugle calls from distant hills; drums of marching columns. Sounds of the stirring of thousands made tremulous the dim silence of the tent.

Dreams long dead arose and possessed her —the confused dreams of a woman, still young, awakened from the passionless lethargy of the past.

Vaguely she felt around her the presence of an earth new born, of a new heaven created. She realized her own awakening; she strove to comprehend *his* resurrection, and it frightened her; she could not understand that what was dead through all these years was now alive, that the ideal she had clung to, evoking it until it had become part of her, was real— an actual and splendid living power. In this vivid resurgence she seemed to lose her precise recollections of him now that he was alive.

While she had believed him dead, everything concerning his memory had been painfully real—his personal appearance, the way he moved, turned, the sound of his voice, the touch of his hand as it tightened in hers when he lay there at sunset, while she and Death watched the color fading from his face.

But now—now that he was living—here in this same world with her again—strive as she would she could neither fix either his features nor the sound of his voice upon her memory. Only the stupefying wonder of it possessed her, dulling her senses so that even the happiness of it seemed unreal.

How would they meet?—they two, who had never met but thrice? How would they seem, each to the other, when first their eyes encountered?

In all their lives they had exchanged so little speech! Yet from the first—from the first moment, when she had raised her gaze to him as he entered in his long, blue cloak, her silence had held a deeper meaning than her speech. And on that blessed night instinct broke the silence; yet, with every formal word

exchanged, consciousness of the occult bond between them grew.

But it was not until she thought him dead that she understood that it had been love—love unheralded, unexpected, incredible– love at the first confronting, the first encountering glance. And to the memory of that mystery she had been faithful from the night on which she believed he died.

How had it been with him throughout these years? *How had it been with him?*

The silvery trumpets of the cavalry were still sounding as she mounted her horse before the colonel's tent and rode out into the splendour of the setting sun.

On every side cavalrymen were setting toe to stirrup; troop after troop, forming by fours, trotted out to the crest of the hill where the Western light lay red across the furrowed grass.

A blaze of brilliant color filled the road where an incoming Zouave regiment had halted, unslinging knapsacks, preparing to encamp; and the setting sun played over them in waves of fire, striking fiercely across their crimson fezzes and trousers.

Through their gorgeous lines the cavalry

rode, colonel and staff leading; and with them rode the Special Messenger, knee to knee with the chief trumpeter, who made his horse dance when he passed the gorgeous Zouave color guard, to show off the gridiron of yellow slashings across his corded and tasseled breast.

And now another infantry regiment blocked the way—a heavy, blue column tramping in with its field music playing and both flags flying in the sunset radiance—the Stars and Stripes, with the number of the regiment printed in gold across crimson; and the State flag—white, an Indian and an uplifted sword on the snowy field: Massachusetts infantry.

On they came, fifes skirling, drums crashing; the colonel of the Fourth Missouri gave them right of way, saluting their colors; the Special Messenger backed her horse and turned down along the column.

Under the shadow of her visor her dark eyes widened with excitement as she skirted the halted cavalry, searching the intervals where the troop captains sat their horses, naked sabres curving up over their shoulder straps.

"Not this one! Not *this* one," her little

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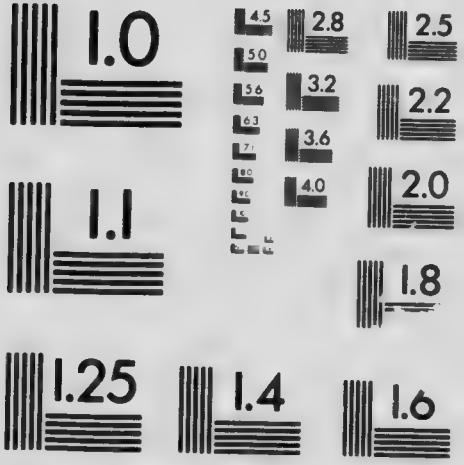

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heart beat hurriedly; and then, without warning, panic came, and she spurred up to the major of the first squadron.

"Where is Captain Stanley?" Her voice almost broke.

"With his troop, I suppose—'F,'" replied that officer calmly; and her heart leaped and the color flooded her face as she saluted, wheeled, and rode on in heavenly certainty.

A New York regiment, fresh from the North, was passing now, its magnificent band playing "Twinkling Stars"; and the horses of the cavalry began to dance and paw and toss their heads.

One splendid black animal reared suddenly and shook its mane out; and at the same moment she saw *him*—knew him—drew bridle, her heart in her mouth, her body all a-tremble.

He was mastering the black horse that had reared, sitting his saddle easily, almost carelessly, his long, yellow-striped legs loosely graceful, his straight, slim figure perfect in poise and balance.

And now the trumpets were sounding; captain after captain turned in his saddle, swung his sabre forward, repeating the order: "Forward—march! Forward—march!"

The Special Messenger whirled her horse and sped to the head of the column.

"I was just beginning to wonder—" began the colonel, when she broke in, breathless:

"*May* I ride with Captain Stanley of F, sir?"

"Certainly," he replied, surprised and a trifle amused. She hesitated, nervously picking at her bridle, then said: "When you once get me through their lines—I mean, after I am safely through and you are ready to turn around and leave me—I—I would like—to—to——"

"Yes?" inquired the colonel, gently, divining some "last message" to deliver. For they were desperate chances that she was taking, and those in the beleaguered city would show her no mercy if they ever caught her within its battered bastions.

But the Special Messenger only said: "Before your regiment goes back, may I tell Captain Stanley who I am?"

The colonel's face fell.

"Nobody is supposed to have any idea who you are——"

"I know it. But is there any harm if I only tell it to—to just this one, single man?"

she asked, earnestly, not aware that her eyes as well as her voice were pleading—that her whole body, bent forward in the saddle, had become eloquent with a confession as winning as it was innocent.

The colonel looked curiously into the eager, flushed face, framed in its setting of dark, curly hair; then he lifted a gauntleted hand from his bridle and slowly stroked his crisp mustache upward to hide the smile he could not control.

"I did not know," he said gravely, "that Captain Stanley was the—ah—'one' and 'only' man."

She blushed furiously; the vivid color ran from throat to temple, burning her ears till they looked like rose petals caught in her dark hair.

"You may tell Captain Stanley—if you must," observed the colonel of the Fourth Missouri. He was gazing absently straight between his horse's ears when he spoke. After a few moments he looked at the sky where, overhead, the afterglow pulsated in bands of fire.

"I always thought," he murmured to himself, "that old Stanley was in love with that

Southern girl he saw at Sandy River. . . . I had no idea he knew the Special Messenger. It appears that I am slightly in error." And, very thoughtfully, he continued to twist his mustache skyward as he rode on.

When he ventured to glance around again the Special Messenger had disappeared.

"Fancy!" he muttered; "fancy old Stanley knowing the mystery of the three armies! And, by gad, gentlemen!" addressing, *sotto voce*, the entire regiment, as he turned in his stirrups and looked back at the darkening column behind him—"by gad! gentlemen of the Fourth Dragoons, no prettier woman ever sat a saddle than is riding this moment with the captain of Troop F!"

What Captain Stanley saw riding up to him through the dull afterglow was a slightly built youth in the uniform of the regular cavalry, yellow trimming on collar, yellow welts about the seams of the jacket, yellow stripes on the breeches; and, as the youth drew bridle, saluted, and turned to ride forward beside him, he caught sight of a lieutenant's shoulder straps on the sergeant's shell jacket.

"Well, youngster," he said, smiling, "don't they clothe you in the regulars?

You're as eccentric as our butternut friends yonder."

"I couldn't buy a full uniform," she said truthfully. She did not add that she had left at a minute's notice for the most dangerous undertaking ever asked of her, borrowing discarded makeshifts anywhere at hazard.

"Are you a West Pointer?"

"No."

"Oh! You've their seat—and their shapely leanness. Are you going with us?"

"Where are *you* going?"

Stanley laughed. "I'm sure I don't know. It looks to me as though we were riding straight into rebeldom."

"Don't you know why?" she asked, looking at him from under the shadow of her visor.

"No. Do you?"

"Yes."

After a pause: "Well," he said, laughing, "are you going to tell me?"

"Yes—later."

Neck and neck, knee and knee they rode forward at the head of the Black Horse troop, along a road which became dusky beyond the first patch of woods.

After the inner camp lines had been passed the regiment halted while a troop was detailed as flankers and an advanced guard galloped off ahead. Along the road behind, the guns of the Rhode Island Battery came thudding and bumping up, halting with a dull clash of chains.

Stanley said: "This is one of Baring's pet raids; we've done it dozens of times. Once our entire division rode around Beauregard; but I didn't see the old, blue star division flag this time, so I guess we're going it alone. Hello! There's infantry! We must be close to the extreme outposts."

In the dusk they were passing a pasture where, guarded by sentinels, lay piled, in endless, straight rows, knapsacks, blankets, shelter tents, and long lines of stacked Springfield rifles. Soldiers with the white strings of canteens crossing their breasts were journeying to and from a stream that ran, darkling, out of the tangled woodland on their right.

On the opposite side of the road were the lines of the Seventieth Indiana, their colors, furled in oilcloth, lying horizontally across the forks of two stacks of rifles. Under them lay the color guard; the scabbarded swords

of the colonel and his staff were stuck upright in the ground, and the blanket-swathed figures of the officers in poncho and havelock reposed close by.

The other regiment was the Eleventh Maine. Their colonel, strapped with his silver eagles, was watching the disposal of the colors by a sergeant wearing the broad stripe, blue diamond and triple underscoring on each sleeve. With the sergeant marched eight corporals, long-limbed, rugged giants of the color company, decorated with the narrow stripe and double chevron.

A few minutes later the cavalry moved out past the pickets, then swung due south.

Night had fallen—a clear, starlit, blossom-scented dimness freshening the air.

The Special Messenger, head bent, was still riding with Captain Stanley, evidently preferring his company so openly, so persistently, that the other officers, a little amused, looked sideways at the youngster from time to time.

After a while Stanley said pleasantly: "We haven't exchanged names yet, and you haven't told me why a regular is riding with us to-night."

"On special service," she said in a low voice.

"And your name and regiment?"

She did not appear to hear him; he glanced at her askance.

"You seem to be very young," he said.

"The colonel of the Ninetieth Rhode Island fell at twenty-two."

He nodded gravely. "It is a war of young men. I think Baring himself is only twenty-five. He's breveted brigadier, too."

"And you?" she asked timidly.

He laughed. "Thirty; and a thousand in experience."

"I, too," she said softly.

"You? Thirty?"

"No, only twenty-four; but your peer in experience."

"Your voice sounds Southern," he said in his pleasant voice, inviting confidence.

"Yes; my home was at Sandy River."

Out of the corners of her eyes she saw him start and look around at her—felt his stern gaze questioning her; and rode straight on before her without response or apparent consciousness.

"Sandy River?" he repeated in a strained voice. "Did you say you lived there?"

"Yes," indifferently.

The captain rode for a while in silence, then, carelessly: "There was, I believe, a family living there before the war—the Westcotes."

"Yes." She could scarcely utter a word for the suffocating throb of her heart.

"You knew them?"

"Yes."

"Do—do they still live at Sandy River?"

"The house still stands. Major Westcote is dead."

"Her—I mean their grandfather?"

She nodded, incapable of speech.

"And"—he hesitated—"and the boy? He used to ride a pony—the most fascinating little fellow——"

"He is at school in the North."

There was a silence, then the captain turned in his saddle and looked straight at her.

"Does Miss Westcote live there still?"

"Do you mean Celia Westcote?" asked the Messenger calmly.

"Yes—Celia—" His voice fell softly, making of her name a caressing cadence. The Special Messenger bent her head lower over her bridle.

"Why do you ask? Did you know her?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

The captain lifted his grave eyes, but the Messenger was not looking at him.

"I knew her—in a way—better than I ever knew any woman, and I saw her only three times in all my life. That is your answer—and my excuse for asking. Does she still live at Sandy River?"

"No."

"Do you know where she has gone?"

"She is somewhere in the South."

"Is she—married?" he asked under his breath.

The Special Messenger looked up at him, smiling in the darkness.

"No," she said. "I heard that she lost her—heart—to a bandmaster of some cavalry regiment who was killed in action at Sandy River—three years ago."

The captain straightened in his saddle as though he had been shot; in the dim light his lean face turned darkly scarlet.

"I see her occasionally," continued the Messenger faintly; "have you any message—perhaps——"

The captain turned slowly toward her. "Do you know where she is?"

"I expect that she will be within riding distance of me—very soon."

"Is your mission a secret one?"

"Yes."

"And you may see her—before very long?"

"Yes."

"Then tell her," said the captain, "that the bandmaster of the Fourth Missouri—" He strove to continue; his voice died in his throat.

"Yes—yes—say it," whispered the Special Messenger. "I will tell her; she will understand—truly she will—whatever you say."

"Tell her—that the bandmaster has—has never forgotten——"

"Yes—yes——"

"Never forgotten her!"

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"That he—he——"

"Yes! Oh, please—please say it—don't be afraid to say—what you wish!"

The captain's voice was not under perfect control.

"Say that he—thinks of her. . . . Say that—that he—he thought of her when he

was falling—there, in the charge at Sandy River——"

"But he once told her that himself!" she cried. "Has he no more to tell her?"

And Captain Stanley, aghast, fairly leaped in his stirrups.

"Who are you?" he gasped. "What do *you* know of——"

His voice was smothered in the sudden outcrash of rifles, through which startled trumpets sounded, followed by the running explosions of cavalry carbines.

"Attention! Draw sabres!" rang out a far voice in the increasing uproar.

The night air thrilled with the rushing swish of steel drawn swiftly across steel.

"Forward!" and "Forward! Forward!" echoed the officers, one after another.

"Steady—right dress!"—taken up by the troop officers: "Steady—right dress! By fours—right wheel—march!"

Pell-mell the flanking parties came crashing back out of the dusky undergrowth, and:

"Steady—trot! Steady—right dress—gallop!" came the orders.

"Gallop!" repeated her captain, blandly;

and, under his breath: "We are going to charge. Quick, tell me who you are!"

"Steady—steady—charge!" came the clear shout from the front.

'Charge! Charge! Charge!" echoed the ringing orders from troop to troop.

In the darkness of the thickets she rode knee to knee with her captain. The grand stride of her horse thundering along beside his through obscurity filled her with wild exultation; she loosened curb and snaffle and spurred forward amid hundreds of plunging horses, now goaded frantic by the battle clangor of the trumpets.

Everywhere, right and left, the red flash of Confederate rifles ran along their flanks; here and there a stricken horse reared or stumbled, rolling over and over; or some bullet-struck rider swayed wide from the saddle and went down to annihilation.

Fringed with darting flames the cavalry drove on headlong into the unseen; behind clanked the flying battery, mounted gunners sabering the dark forms that leaped out of the underbrush; on—on—rushed horses and guns, riders and cannoneers—a furious, irresistible, chaotic torrent, thundering through the night.

"'Yes,' she gasped, 'the Special Messenger—noncombatant!'"

Far behind them now danced and flickered the rifle flames; fainter, fainter grew the shots; and at last, galloping steadily and, by degrees, reforming as they rode, the column swung out toward the bushy hills in the west, slowed to a canter, to a trot, to a walk.

"We are through!" said the Special Messenger, brokenly, breathing fast as she pulled in her mount and turned in the starlight toward the man she rode beside.

At the same moment the column halted; and he drew bridle and looked steadily at her.

All around them was the confusion and turmoil of stamping, panting horses, the clank of metal, the heavy breathing of men.

"Look at me!" she whispered, baring her head in the starlight. "Quick! Look at me! Do you know me now? Look at me—if you —love me!"

A low cry broke from him; she held out both arms to him in the dim light, forcing her horse up against his stirrup.

"If you love me," she breathed, "say so now!"

Leaning free from his saddle he caught her in his arms, held her, looked into her eyes.

"You?"

"Yes," she gasped, "the Special Messenger—noncombatant!"

"The Special Messenger? *You?* Good God!"

A dull tattoo of hoofs along the halted column, nearer, nearer, clattering toward them from the front, and:

"Good-by!" she sobbed; "they're coming for me! Oh—do you love me? Do you? Life was so dark and dreadful without you! I—I never forgot—never, never! I——"

Her gloved hands crept higher around the neck of the man who held her crushed in his arms.

"If I return," she sighed, "will you love me? Don't—don't look at me that way. I will return—I promise. I love you so! I love you!"

Their lips clung for a second in the darkness, then she swung her horse, tearing herself free of his arms; and, bared head lifted to the skies, she turned south, riding all alone out into the starlit waste.

(2)

THE END

OTHER BOOKS

BY

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

Mr. Chambers is unquestionably the most popular of American novelists to-day. He is the author of some thirty books of extraordinary variety in fiction. He was born in New York, and studied in the studios of Paris to become an artist. While working at painting he took up writing as a pastime, and had such immediate success that he soon gave up art and turned to literature as his life work. Always, as a part of this interest, he has studied and worked in the field of natural history, so that to-day he is something of an authority on birds and butterflies, a confirmed fisherman, and a good shot. All these qualities—the study of art, the experience with nature, both in the line of sport and as an entomologist—

have put their stamp upon his work, as will be seen by a glance at his books, for only a few of which there is space here available.

THE FIRING LINE

The most recent of his works is the third in a group of studies in American society life. It is full of the swing of good romance, behind which lies the bright philosophy that the saving quality in our American families is to come with the injection of fresh blood into each new generation. The story itself deals with the adopted daughter of a multimillionaire, who does not even know her own parentage—a girl from nowhere, with all the charm and beauty which a bringing up in the midst of wealth can give her. The hero is a young American of good family who first meets her at Palm Beach, Florida. Here is a background that Mr. Chambers loves—the outdoor life of exotic Florida, the everglades, the hunting, the shooting, and the sea—all in the midst of that other exotic life which goes with a winter resort and a large group of the idle rich. The story—already in

its 150th thousand—is, perhaps, the author's favorite piece of work.

THE YOUNGER SET

is also of the social *comédie humaine* of America, with its scenes laid in New York and on Long Island. Here again, behind a romance of love and of society complications, Mr. Chambers conceals his philosophic suggestions that may be gathered from the title. The younger set comes into our society fresh and unspoiled with each generation, and in its way contributes something of freshness, something of vigor to keep the social world from going down hill on a grade of decadence. The story deals with a man who, although still young, feels that his life is practically over because his marriage, through no fault of his own, has proved a failure and ended in divorce. He meets a young girl just introduced into society, whose wholesome youth charms him and leads him back to optimism and life. The character of *Eileen* is perhaps one of Mr. Chambers's most real and most successful creations. The fact that this novel, after one year, is in its

200th thousand is sufficient proof of its popularity. In

THE FIGHTING CHANCE

the author still deals with American society, but here his background is the consideration of the evil influences of inheritance in old families. The scene is still New York and Long Island, full of the charm of outdoor life and hunting episodes. The principal male character *Siward* is cursed with the inheritance of drink. *Siward's* struggles to conquer his Enemy, and the fighting chance he sees at last in the affection of a girl, carry on the story to a hopeful finish. The novel has been published two years and a few months and more than 250,000 copies have been sold, so that its claims to success are undeniable.

THE RECKONING

The varied interests of the author which have been suggested above are sustained in

this novel. It is a story of a side light of the American Revolution, and it makes the fourth novel in a series of books telling in fiction of the scenes and invoking the characters in the Mohawk Valley during the war for American Independence. The first novel of the series was "Cardigan"; the second, "The Maid-at-Arms"; the third is still to be written, when the distinguished author can find time; while "The Reckoning" is the last.

IOLE

Another splendid example of the author's versatility is this farcical, humorous satire on the *art nouveau* of to-day. Mr. Chambers, with all his knowledge of the artistic jargon, has in this little novel created a pious fraud of a father, who brings up his eight lovely daughters in the Adirondacks, where they wear pink pajamas and eat nuts and fruit, and listen to him while he lectures them and everybody else on art. It is easy to imagine what happens when several rich and practical young New Yorkers stumble upon this group. Everybody is happy in the end.

THE TRACER OF LOST PERSONS

Here again is a totally different vein of half humor and half seriousness. Mr. Chambers selects a firm of detectives (based, by the way, on fact) who guarantee to find lost persons, missing heirs, etc. In this case the author's fancy and humor suggest to a young bachelor, who has always had an ideal girl in mind, that he go and describe her as a real person to *Mr. Keen*, the Tracer of Lost Persons. He gives his description, and, as may be supposed, *Mr. Keen* finds the girl, but after such a series of episodes, escapes, discoveries and dénouements that it takes a full-grown novel to accomplish the task.

THE TREE OF HEAVEN

Half in fancy, half in fact, the thread of an occult idea runs through this weird theme. You cannot, even at the end, be quite sure whether the author has been making fun of you or not. Perhaps, if the truth were told, he could not quite tell you himself. The tale

all hangs about one of a group of friends who lives for years in the Far East and gathers some of the occult knowledge of that far-off land. Into the woof of an Eastern rug is woven the soul of a woman. Into the glisten of a scarab is polished the prophecy of a life. Into the whole charming romance of the book is woven the thread of an intangible, "creepy," mysterious force. What is it? Is it a joke? Who knows?

SOME LADIES IN HASTE

This novel is as widely different from all the others as if another hand had written it and another mind conceived it. This time, too, it is impossible to say whether the author is quizzing our new thought transference and telepathic friends, or whether he is half inclined to suggest that "there may be something in it." Here is a character who suddenly discovers that by concentrating his mind on certain ideas he can inject or project them into others. And forthwith he sets half a dozen couples making love to each other in most grotesque surroundings. They climb trees and become

engaged. They put on strange Panlike costumes and prance about the woods—always charming, always well bred, always with a touch of romance that makes the reader read on to the end and finally lay the book down with a smile of pleasure and a little sigh that it is over so soon.

One might run on for twenty books more, but there is not space enough even to mention Mr. Chambers's delightful nature books for children, telling how *Geraldine* and *Peter* go wandering through "Outdoorland," "Mountain-Land," "Orchard-Land," "River-Land," "Forest-Land," and "Garden-Land." They, in turn, are as different from his novels in fancy and conception as each of his novels from the other. No living writer has given to the public so varied a list of books with such extraordinary popularity in all of them as Mr. Robert W. Chambers.

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